



GUY  
MERVYN

BY  
BRANDON ROTE



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# GUY MERVYN

A Novel

BY

B R A N D O N R O Y

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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# GUY MERVYN.

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## CHAPTER I.

“CONFFOUND all tutors!” said Sir Guy Mervyn, impatiently kicking the stones before him, as he strode along the country road. “What next, I wonder? I suppose they’ll suggest chartering a dancing-master to put me through my paces, and a parson to teach me the Catechism! The long and short of it is, I won’t have one; and, if he comes, by Jupiter, I’ll make the place too hot for him!”

Sir Guy was thoroughly ruffled, and being a young man whose language was at all

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times somewhat highly seasoned, he proceeded to solace himself with a few remarks too strong to record, in which he consigned the whole race of tutors to a place even warmer than he threatened to make Mervyn Hall. Then he felt better. His fair young face cleared and brightened ; he left off viciously kicking the stones, and whistling to his dog, who had carefully kept at a respectful distance during his master's fit of ill-temper, he threw himself down on a mossy bank by the side of the road, and looking up into the green depths of an old oak overhead, laughed aloud at the unreasonableness of his short-lived anger.

“Sweet little mother of mine!” he said, and the smile on his handsome mouth was full of tenderness ; “I hope she did not know I was vexed. Anyhow, it was not with her. It is always Gertrude, with her confounded interference, who puts her up to plaguing me about my mind and manners.

Save a man from his elder sisters, say I ! Never mind, Bidger," as a cold nose was pushed anxiously into his hand ; " I wasn't cross with you, old dog. If they set a dozen white-tied tutors on us, you and I would give them the slip, wouldn't we, Bidger ? And they might scour the country after us till they walked off their reverend legs!"

Bidger wagged his tail in energetic assent, and looked gratefully into his master's face, as though the fault had been his, and he had just been forgiven. The next moment he pricked up his ears at the sound of approaching wheels, and gave a short, sharp bark.

Sir Guy raised himself on his elbow, just as an open landau, drawn by a magnificent pair of greys, swept round the corner. In it a lady sat alone, leaning listlessly back against the cushions, apparently paying little or no heed to anything around her ; but, at

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another sharp bark from Bidger, she turned her head and glanced at the young man and his dog.

Involuntarily, Guy sprang to his feet, and stood looking after the carriage, till a turn in the road hid it from sight. Then, with a long, low whistle:

“Bless us, Bidger!” he said. “What a beauty! You and I are a highly favoured couple. I bet you a mutton-bone we’ve seen the Queen of Sheba!”

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The Lady Elaine Monk, of The Towers, sat in the drawing-room at Mervyn Hall, paying her first call on its new owners. Mrs. Mervyn sat opposite her, an affable smile on her kind face, but thinking, inwardly, how exceedingly difficult it was to get on with a visitor whose thoughts seemed to be so far away from her present surroundings.

• Gertrude, cudgelling her brains for some

interesting remark with which to revive the flagging conversation and attract Lady Elaine's attention to herself, secretly wondered at her rare loveliness, and noted it with that pang of jealousy which *rather* pretty girls are apt to feel at sight of queenly beauty.

Beryl, summoned from the schoolroom, and hurriedly arrayed in her best frock, sighed deeply at intervals, as she sat looking out of the window, wondering what Guy was doing, and heartily wishing stupid people would not call just as she had nearly finished her lessons and was going out to find him.

At this moment an opportune, if not entirely desirable, interruption occurred.

“Yes, we like this place very much,” Mrs. Mervyn was saying; “though it is a great contrast to our Highland home;” when, as if to illustrate the remark, the door burst violently open, and in dashed a rough Scotch collie, making straight for Beryl, and jumping

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round her in a high state of excited delight, his quick short bark saying, as plainly as words could speak: “Come out, little mistress; come out and play.”

“Down, Bidger; down, sir!” cried Beryl, whose face had brightened at sight of Guy’s dog; “go out, old doggie, at once, and I only wish I could go too. Tell Guy I’m coming soon, and he is to wait.”

Bidger wagged his tail, and dashing out of the French window, bounded across the lawn, and disappeared in the shrubbery.

“Bidger?” said Lady Elaine. “What a very uncommon name.”

“Is it not hideous!” cried Gertrude indignantly. “He is a nice dog, in spite of his bad manners, so *I* named him Bijou; but Guy said a Scotch dog should not have a stupid French name, so——”

“Guy said a *beastly* French name,” interrupted Beryl.

“So,” continued Gertrude, frowning at her

sister, “Guy calls him Bidger, which he says is the only sensible way to pronounce Bijou ; but I wish he had taken altogether another name, for he tells everyone that I named him Bidger !”

“ *You* never could have thought of half such a nice name,” began Beryl indignantly, but stopped short at a look from her mother.

Lady Elaine seemed nearer smiling than she had hitherto been during her visit ; but she only said :

“ And is Sir Guy very fond of his dog ?”

“ Very,” answered Mrs. Mervyn ; “ they are quite inseparable. Whenever you see Bidger, you may be quite sure his master is not far off.”

At that moment Guy emerged from the shrubbery, crossed the lawn, and, only seeing his mother and Beryl sitting near the window, called out in his clear young voice :

“ I say, mother ; I’ve seen *such* a phiz driving down the road behind a pair of greys !

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Bidger and I both thought it could be no less a personage than the Queen of She——”

He stopped short in blank dismay, as he reached the window and saw the other occupants of the room ; then—for poor Guy was no courtier—“Jupiter Ammon !” he said, beneath his breath, and vanished even more suddenly than he had appeared.

An awkward silence in the drawing-room ; then Mrs. Mervyn, ignoring with womanly tact the most awkward part of Guy’s performance, apologized to her visitor for his abrupt appearance and departure.

“I hope you will excuse my boy, Lady Elaine. Having lived all his life in the Highlands, he has yet to learn what is required of him in his new position.”

And then she went on to inquire whether Lady Elaine knew of a good tutor, as she was seeking one to coach Sir Guy for college.

Meanwhile, Gertrude slipped out into the garden to scold her brother.

"Guy, how *could* you? It is the worst blunder you ever made, which is saying a great deal. A ploughboy would not have been so rude; and when you saw her you could easily have pretended you meant someone else."

"I couldn't," said honest Guy, "for there she sat as large as life; and I leave the elegant accomplishment of fibbing to my eldest sister, who does enough for the whole family. But who on earth is she?"

"Lady Elaine, from The Towers!" said Gertrude, smothering her wrath, that she might announce the crushing fact. "And there we expected to meet all the best society in the county; and she has called so soon, which was most gratifying to mamma and me; and then you come and insult her, and talk about her *phiz*—her *phiz*, indeed!"

"I am awfully sorry, and I'll go in and tell her so; and I only meant that she was very beautiful. I'll tell her that, too—women

always like to be admired ; and I'll beg her, on my bended knee, to ask you to The Towers all the same, or I shall never have another day's peace in my life." And Guy turned towards the house.

" Guy, stop ! You will do nothing of the kind ; you would only make matters worse. No doubt mamma is apologizing for you. I dare say she will be quite as friendly to *us* ; but, of course, she will never notice *you* after this. And just when she had been saying how much she wished to meet you !"

Here Miss Gertrude drew on her imagination.

Poor Guy looked really mortified.

" I say, Gerty ; she hardly can have heard, and I don't believe she minded."

" Heard ? Of course she did ! I saw the colour come into her face, though she is too perfect a lady to show in any other way that she felt or resented such rudeness."

Guy turned away, whistling for Bidger ;

and Gertrude went indoors, flattering herself that for once she had made her brother sorry for his tiresome behaviour.

But Guy, notwithstanding his boyish roughness and lack of polished manners, had in his veins the blood of generations of true English gentlemen, and his idea of *amende honorable* was very different to Gertrude's.

He made his way quickly round to the drive, and seeing the carriage still at the door, bounded down the avenue; and being as fleet of foot as the royal stags of his Highland home, he was soon waiting by the same mossy bank where, not an hour before, he had seen Lady Elaine drive past. His heart beat quickly as the greys once more came in sight, and a momentary impulse seized him to jump over the fence into the wood beyond; but he stood his ground, and as the carriage came close upon him, stepped forward and called to the men to stop. Then he saw

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with surprise that it was empty. "Her ladyship" had preferred to walk home, the footman said, by the short way through the woods, and had ordered them to return without her.

For a moment Sir Guy hesitated ; then cleared the fence, and stood in the wood

"Find her, Bidger!" he said. "Find her, old doggie!"

## CHAPTER II.

ALL things were bright and beautiful, on that summer afternoon, as Lady Elaine walked back to The Towers from Mervyn Hall. The woods rang with songs of birds, but Lady Elaine heard them not. The path she trod was carpeted with moss and bordered with bluebells; but Lady Elaine saw them not. Little peeps of blue sky, flecked with white clouds, shone through the trees, and the sunbeams danced among the bright green leaves, and played upon her as she passed; but what mattered that the sun shone warm and bright around, when in her heart was no sweet sunshine of happiness and love, but only gloom, and cold, cold shadows?

Lady Elaine was wrapt in thought on that summer afternoon, so deeply that she started violently as something came crashing through the underwood, and Bidger, jumping out before her, stood right in her path, and uttered a triumphant bark.

He did not appear at all inclined to let her pass, but looked up anxiously and imploringly into her face, with those wonderful dog-eyes which express so infinitely more than many human ones.

Lady Elaine must have forgotten Mrs. Mervyn's remark about Bidger's appearance being a sure sign of his master's proximity, for, stooping down, she stroked his head, remarking, with a half-smile :

“ Really, Bidger, you are almost as rude as your master!”

“ But nothing like so sorry,” said a voice close beside her ; and looking up, Lady Elaine saw, for the third time that afternoon,

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Sir Guy Mervyn, the new baronet and master of Mervyn Hall.

He looked very handsome, standing before her, cap in hand, in all the healthy vigour and strength of his youth, hot and flushed with running and scrambling across the wood ; and there was such a truly penitent expression on his frank boyish face, that Lady Elaine felt a sudden impulse to put her hand into his, and make friends on the spot. However, on second thoughts she merely smiled, and tried to pass on.

But this was easier thought than done. Having come so far to apologize and obtain forgiveness, Guy was not going back without thoroughly doing the one and receiving the other. Moreover, Lady Elaine could not feign ignorance of his meaning, having acknowledged to Bidger that she remembered his offence. Guy saw her hesitate, and, with his usual impetuosity, plunged headlong into the subject.

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“Lady Elaine, I am awfully sorry ! If you don’t believe me, just ask Bidger. I’ve been tearing along like mad to catch you. You must have thought me such a confounded brute, if you believed I meant to be rude to you ! Indeed I didn’t ! You know as you passed by Bidger barked, and you looked at us ; and I had never seen a face so lovely in all my life. That was all I meant to tell my mother. Gertrude says I ought not to have said ‘phiz,’ but I always say ‘phiz’ when I mean face, though I never will again, if I live to be a hundred. Don’t be hard on a fellow, Lady Elaine !” and there was a tender pleading in his voice, and a look in his blue eyes, such as she would not have expected in this rough boy. “Don’t be hard on a fellow, just because he admired you a bit too much, and isn’t blessed with manners.”

Then Lady Elaine acted on her first impulse. She put her hand straight into his, and said, with her sweetest smile :

“Come, Sir Guy, this is much ado about nothing! Say no more about it. Of course I knew your remark was not meant for me to hear; and, after all, it was a fortunate one, since it has made us acquainted. Now, as the wood is lonely, and in case someone else waylays me, or sets a bloodhound on my track, suppose you and Bidger give me the benefit of your escort and protection until we reach the open ground.”

“May we?” said Guy. “May we really, Lady Elaine?” And then, all his roughness subdued for the moment, the courtly grace of his ancestors, which was in him by nature, came out all unbidden; and stooping over the hand she had given him in token of forgiveness, he kissed it.

But the next moment he was the Highland lad again, as tossing up his cap he said, with a merry laugh :

“Won’t I crow over Gertrude! Do you know, Lady Elaine, she was in an awful funk

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lest you should never ask her to The Towers."

They walked on together through the wood ; he chatting merrily, she thoroughly amused for once, and preferring his company to her own sad thoughts. At last, in answer to a question from him :

" Of course I shall ask you to The Towers, Sir Guy," she said, " whenever your mother or sisters are coming ; but "—smiling up at him—" you must not talk slang to my lady visitors, or remark upon their ' phizes ' before them."

" Oh ! Lady Elaine, that is really unkind, and after you had forgiven me, too ! I shall never hear that word without feeling so awfully ashamed."

She looked up at him again. There was something to her particularly fascinating about this frank, outspoken young fellow. It was with a feeling of genuine interest in him that she said gently :

“Sir Guy, what a pity you cannot always be as you are just now.”

“In what way, Lady Elaine?”

“Why, a gentleman.”

He started, and coloured.

“I trust I am always that,” he said quickly.

“Ah! but what is your definition of a gentleman?”

“Never to do a mean action, and never to tell a lie.”

“Yes,” she said warmly; “I am sure you keep to that standard, and it is a noble and true one. But why not also be a gentleman in manners?”

Surely this would pique him, she thought, even as she said it, and half wished it unsaid. But his nature was too noble, too free from petty littleness to be piqued by plain speaking, and he answered simply:

“I wish I could be, Lady Elaine. Will you tell me how to set about it?”

“Well,” she said, smiling, and half in play;

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“get a good tutor, and work hard ; consult your tailor ; have a dancing-master ; leave off using slang and invoking heathen deities when you are in the company of ladies ; learn your catechism, and read your Bible ; then, I am sure you will be a model young man.”

Why did Lady Elaine include reading the Bible, a book she herself very rarely took up, among her list of desirable accomplishments ? In times to come, she sometimes wondered—wondered why. She laughed as she said it, meaning him to see that her whole lecture was more in play than earnest ; but Guy was grave, and when she ceased speaking, he said quietly :

“I will do them, every one, Lady Elaine.”

“Even the catechism ?” she asked, laughing.

“Yes, even the catechism.”

What had come to Guy ? Had her sweet gray eyes bewitched him ? Who knows ? A word from a woman has before now

decided the whole course of a man's life in this world, and—God help us—in the next ; has made it either a strong power for good, or a fearful one for evil. Whatever came to Guy, the fact remains the same : that he entered that wood a merry, reckless, headstrong boy ; he left it a young man, unchanged indeed in many ways, but with an earnest purpose, and a fixed determination to carry through that purpose to the end. Afterwards he always thought that change came over him when Lady Elaine placed her hand in his, in token of forgiveness, and when he, stooping, kissed it.

They walked on through the wood, and he told her much of his home life ; she listening and drawing him out, but giving him no confidence in return.

“ You know, Lady Elaine, Beryl is my pet, and always has been. Gertrude I never can and never could get on with. She always makes me feel inclined to swear !

Don't you think she is awfully prim? So different to mother and the little one." And so on, and so on, until she seemed to know all about this boy and his thoughts and feelings. And *he*? he did not even know her full name, or *her husband's*.

They reached the park gates of The Towers.

"Good-bye, Sir Guy; and don't forget my lecture!"

"Good-bye, Lady Elaine. You are quite sure you forgive me?"

"Of course; but there was nothing to forgive." And when she was gone, Guy knelt on the ground, and laid his head on his dog's shaggy one.

"Oh Bidger, Bidger——" but only Bidger heard the rest.

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"Where can the boy possibly be? Gertrude, you should not have made such a fuss

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over that awkward little episode. He thinks we are vexed with him, and is keeping away."

Mrs. Mervyn was growing anxious. The lamps were lighted ; they had long grown tired of waiting dinner, and still Guy did not come. It was a lovely summer night, and the windows stood wide open. Little Beryl, feeling injured and deserted, sat near them, listening for Guy's return. Suddenly she jumped up, crying : "Mother, he is coming ! I hear him whistling up the avenue !"

The next minute, in came Bidger ; and before Beryl could go to meet him, Guy himself bounded up the steps.

" My dear boy, where have you been ?"

" Forgive me, mother darling. I've been a long walk in the woods ; first with Lady Elaine, Miss Gertrude, who sends you a message to the effect that you shall certainly come to The Towers, in spite of your rude brother ; afterwards away, ever so far, alone

with Bidger ; and, oh mother !” and he dropped playfully on one knee before her, “you are please to find me a tutor, and a tailor, and a dancing-master, and a Bible ; for I’m going to mend my ways ; and some day, when I’m good enough, I mean to marry Lady Elaine.”

“ Guy ! My dear boy ! Marry Lady Elaine ! Why, don’t you know——” but the mother stopped short. She saw by the look in his face that this was not one of his wild jokes ; she saw, shining there, the light of his first young love.

Not so Gertrude. “ What, Guy ? *You* marry Lady Elaine ?”

“ Yes, miss. Why not ?”

“ For two very excellent reasons. First, she is at least ten years older than you are ! Secondly, she is married already.”

“ Married already !”

Guy rose to his feet, and stood still for one minute ; then burst out laughing.

“Married already! So she is! Of course; come, Bidger!” And together they went out into the starlight.

Late that night, his mother knelt beside his bed.

“Oh, mother, mother! I love her, I love her! Why didn’t she tell me? You can’t know how I feel!”

“I do know, my boy, my darling!”

‘As one whom his mother comforteth’—was there ever a truer word?

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On that same evening, Lady Elaine sat in her boudoir writing letters. Half-a-dozen uninteresting little notes had been rapidly tossed off, and lay in a pile ready for posting. Then she took some larger paper, and wrote a letter over which she smiled very often, and paused once or twice to consider; toying with some sweet yellow roses on the table beside her. This letter was to her friend, Muriel Bruce, and ran thus:

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“The Towers,

“June 6th, 18—

“MY DEAREST MURIEL,

“At last something really interesting has occurred, and agreeably varied the usual dreary routine of my life. I hasten to record it for your edification, though it happened only this afternoon.

“What say you to having a hound put upon one’s track in a lonely forest, and being persistently kept prisoner by the animal until the arrival of his young and handsome master! But I must tell you from the beginning.

“I believe you heard of the death of old Sir Guy Mervyn, owner of Mervyn Hall, the next estate to Mr. Monk’s? He was on bad terms with everyone, particularly his own next-of-kin, as is often the way with crusty old bachelors. They are said to have been not very well off, and residing somewhere in the Highlands, when news came to

them one day that these fine estates, Sir Guy's large fortune, and the baronetcy, were theirs at last. The family consists of Mrs. Mervyn, two daughters, and one son, the new baronet. The three former arrived here about a fortnight ago ; young Sir Guy followed them from Scotland the day before yesterday.

“ This afternoon I went to pay my first call at Mervyn Hall. On the way I chanced to notice, lounging on a bank by the roadside, a not ill-favoured young giant and a fine collie dog. The latter barked at the carriage, and the former stared at me as though I were the first of my sex he had ever beheld.

“ I paid my call, and found them pleasant people enough. Mrs. Mervyn—a sweet, motherly woman, something like my own mother—was not, I could see, at all favourably impressed with me. I know I did not shine—I never do now—I cannot help it. I was thinking all the time how these new

people would soon hear the gossip about The Towers, and then they would *pity* me, as others do, and call me ‘poor thing.’ I would sooner be thought heartless, soulless, mindless, than that anyone should know how I suffer—suffer. No matter! It will be all the same in a hundred years; and, at least, *you* understand me, darling.

“ Well, suddenly, just as I am thinking of taking my leave, in comes the identical collie dog I had seen on the bank, and who, by the way, rejoices in the charming name of Bidger, his master’s pronunciation of Bijou. He is followed by the young giant, who turns out to be Sir Guy. Crossing the lawn and coming straight up to the window, before anyone can warn him of my presence, he makes a very audible and rather unfortunate remark about having seen me drive past—something about ‘such a phiz!’ Then, catching sight of me, ‘Jupiter Ammon!’ he cries, with a most comical expression of

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consternation, and rapidly makes off. Rather an awkward predicament, was it not? Mrs. Mervyn apologises, and asks me if I know of a tutor for her son. I inwardly think it would take the combined efforts of several tutors to tame this young bear, and presently take my departure, sending on the carriage, that I may walk home through the woods and enjoy an hour of solitude.

“ And now comes the strangest part of the story. I have not proceeded far on my way, when suddenly ‘ Bidger ’ springs out upon me, placing himself resolutely in my path; and before I can attempt to pass or avoid the creature, his master stands before me, looking dismally penitent; and, now that I see him more closely, remarkably handsome, tall and broad-shouldered, with a frank, boyish face and the clearest, truest pair of blue eyes you ever saw. As I try to pass on, he pours out a most eager apology for his rudeness; candid, ingenuous, and withal rather comical,

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and wholly irresistible. Then, if you will believe it, I make friends with this wild boy of the woods, and we stroll on together. He is delightfully free from any shyness or constraint, and talks away volubly ; giving me a bright account of his home, his mother, his beloved Highlands, and himself ; and revealing to me, quite unconsciously, what a noble, true, loving nature this young baronet possesses. I am really interested, and find myself thawing more and more, till at last I give Sir Guy much good advice, which he promises earnestly to follow, and we part at the park gates the best of friends. I could not ask him to come on to The Towers, not knowing in what mood I might find my lord and master ; and young Sir Guy's chivalrous, impetuous manner warned me not to take him where he might overhear some insulting remark made to me, or see the butt-end of a riding-whip threateningly raised.

"So, you see, my dear Muriel, I am thoroughly interested in my young Achilles; and intend to constitute myself his Mentor, and help him all I can. He is only nineteen, so I can be quite maternal over him, and he promises to be an apt pupil. You would not believe how wonderfully his manner changed and improved as we walked together through the woods. Once or twice he parted the brambles for me, quite in Sir Walter Raleigh style; and when I gave him my hand in token of forgiveness, wincing in anticipation of a bear-like squeeze, he bent and kissed it with remarkable grace.

"Now, good-bye, dearest. I left Mr. Monk over his wine, and I hear them assisting him to his room, whither I must follow. God help me!

"Oh, Muriel, I sometimes wish I were dead!

"Always your friend,

"ELAINE."

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The answer to this epistle arrived a few days later, and ran as follows :

“ June 7th, 18—

“ MY DEAREST ELAINE,

“ Your long and interesting letter has just arrived, and I hasten to answer it, although I have only time for a mere scribble. I cannot help feeling amused over your very vivid description of the meeting in the woods, and of your taking upon yourself to lecture a young man on his manners and deportment during the first afternoon of your acquaintance. I say *young man* advisedly ; for when in their twentieth year, young men are not generally called *boys* ; are they, dear ?

“ Seriously, Elaine ; *do* be careful, or this young Sir Guy will be falling in love with you ! I hope he knows you are married ? Anyone might meet you for weeks and remain entirely ignorant of Mr. Monk’s

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existence. You never mention him ; and not much wonder, poor darling !

“ Now don’t be *too* sweet with Sir Guy ; for, when you choose, you can throw off your cold, languid manner, and be simply *charming* ; and if he sees you do this for him only, and no one else, it will be anything but good for him. Remember you are but seven-and-twenty, and not at all *maternal* looking. Don’t be vexed with me for writing so plainly. I know you have his interests really at heart ; but I foresee a danger you very likely would not think of.

“ Do you know, Elaine, you often remind me of two lines of Byron’s ?

“ ‘ But your cold people are beyond all price  
When once you’ve broken their confounded ice.’

By the way, that last line is rather in your friend’s style of language.

“ Dearest, what can I say to comfort you in your sorrows ? Words seem so useless ;

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action is so impossible ! How deeply we are both suffering just now, though from such different causes. Surely a brighter day must dawn ere long. Till then, courage !

“ You can always be sure of the entire love and sympathy of

“ Your friend,

“ MURIEL.

“ P.S.—Could you not recommend C. B. as a tutor for Sir Guy ? I have heard, indirectly, that he is seeking such a post. It would be a great comfort to me if he was where *you* would see him occasionally ; I could let you have his address, and all particulars.”

## CHAPTER III.

‘THERE were giants in the earth in those days,’ read the Vicar; and all the rustics in the free seats with one accord stared at Sir Guy, as though they thought him an interesting specimen of the race turned up in church that morning to prove the truth of Scripture.

Truth to tell, poor Guy felt somewhat out of place as he sat in the Hall pew, which occupied an unfortunately prominent position in the chancel.

Religion did not come natural to Guy; not even that very easily digested form of religion to be obtained at most country churches; cut and dried, and served up by the Vicar; with a little nasal sauce, the contribution of the

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village choir, adding piquancy and flavour to the dish.

Guy's whole being revolted against two long hours of imprisonment on a glorious summer morning, wedged into a narrow pew, where, as the Irishman said, it was "quite impossible to kneel down, and exceedingly difficult to get up again." Not that Guy had the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind; for, "Why on earth, Gerty," he said, when his sister remonstrated with him for his irreverent behaviour, "should *I* have to kneel while other people say their prayers? —and confounded long ones they are, too!" So it came to pass that most Sunday mornings found Guy roaming about the woods and hills with Bidger. And is it rank heresy, or the simple truth, to say that, in thus learning to know and love the beauties of God's glorious universe, his mind and heart were all unconsciously drawn nearer to the great Mind of Omniscient Wisdom, and the great Heart

of Eternal Love? And when the time came for him to know it, Guy believed and rested in his Father's love more simply, perhaps, than he might have done had he oftener gone through the meaningless form—which the Church service certainly then was to him—of bored acquiescence in other people's devotions.

Nevertheless, on the Sunday in question, Guy appeared in church, somewhat to the surprise of his mother and sisters. They had been in their seats quite five minutes, when, just before the service commenced, he strode up the aisle, closely followed by Bidger. Many were the admiring glances bestowed upon young Sir Guy's handsome face and stalwart figure, as he made his way to the chancel; awkwardly colliding with the Vicar in his dignified exit from the vestry, and with Ebenezer Bones, the clerk, who, still more dignified, followed in his wake. Unfortunately, they both caught sight of

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Bidger, and, at a glance from the Vicar, Bones turned, and busiling back up the chancel, made a sudden grab at that quadruped's tail, as he passed into the pew after his master. Now, “Muster Bones” was noted for the energetic zeal with which he discharged his duties ; therefore, although Bidger promptly took refuge under the seat, he was proceeding with his efforts to catch and summarily eject him from “within these 'ere sacred walls,” when Sir Guy who had at first thought the old man was trying to give him a hassock, became aware of his hostile intention towards Bidger, and, momentarily forgetting, in his indignation, where he was—“Leave him alone, you old codger!” he said, in unfortunately audible tones. “He's as good a Christian as you are, any day !”

Bones retreated, highly discomfited, to the delight of the giggling choir ; and Lady Elaine, sitting just opposite, bent over her prayer-book to hide an irrepressible smile.

It was a queer little church ; most little country churches are queer in some things—this one was in many. Chief among its peculiarities was a selection of texts stencilled upon the walls. These had been chosen, folks said, by the Vicar's wife, with the most wonderful appropriateness. For instance, in large letters over the free seats appeared 'Ask, and it shall be given you.' "I should think they do that enough already," thought Guy, as he read it and glanced at the occupants of the pews beneath. On the other hand, those occupying cushioned seats of their own were exhorted to 'Be clothed with humility ;' and so on, throughout the church. The usual amount of cobwebs were to be seen in every available nook and cranny ; and the dust lay thick in the window-sills and on the carved stonework of the pillars. Guy fell to wondering why good folks were so perfectly content that the place in which they worshipped God should remain in a condition

of dust and dirt, such as he would not for a moment have tolerated in his stables. “Surely,” he thought, “if the parson *really* believed that God saw and heard him at his prayers, he would take care that He did not see His house chockfull of filth and cobwebs. But they are all a confounded lot of humbugs, and don’t believe half of what they teach other people.”

So thought Sir Guy, jumping to conclusions with rather too much common-sense and youthful impetuosity. So might anyone think, who ever thought twice about the matter, or took the trouble to count the cobwebs to be seen thick and plentiful in many of our churches. Certainly, the Vicar’s wife might aptly have added to her collection of texts, and stencilled up in the chancel, Prov. xxx. 28, ‘The spider taketh hold with her hands.’

The service was over. Guy stretched

himself, and yawning wearily, walked down the aisle, behind his mother, and in the porch went through a series of introductions to all sorts of charming people. He had always been out when they called, much to the disappointment of the match-making mothers in the neighbourhood—all most anxious to see this eligible young baronet, who in a year or two would “do so nicely for one of the dear girls.” Guy being “out,” frequently meant a rapid exit from the window as the visitors came in at the door. He got well scolded for this by his mother and Gertrude afterwards.

“But really, you know,” he said, on one of these occasions, half defiant, half rueful, “you can’t expect a fellow to sit for an hour looking such an awful fool on a velvet chair, to be simpered at by a lot of silly girls, and spied at through tortoiseshell eye-glasses by their fat mammas.”

“Well, Guy,” Gertrude answered ironically, “all I can say is, you shouldn’t look ‘an

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awful fool ;' and as for *our* friends *simpering*, they never do anything so ill-bred ; and pray don't suppose anyone wants particularly to see *you*."

Then Beryl rushed indignantly to the rescue.

" Guy *never* looks a fool ; and *everybody* wants to see Guy ! Yesterday, when old Lady Flamingo called with her three daughters, I was in the drawing-room, and had only just time to slip behind the nearest curtain as Lawford ushered them in. I got out by the window afterwards, when you were showing them the picture opposite. But, before mother came in, you should have heard how those girls went on ! It was all about Guy—‘ Ma, do you think Sir Guy will appear ?’ ‘ Ma, is my hat straight ?’ ‘ If he doesn't, don't you think you might ask for him ?’ ‘ Should I have time just to take one peep in that glass before they come in ?’ ‘ Does this red velvet chair set me off well, or

shall I slip on to the sofa ?' 'Are you quite sure he isn't married already—or engaged to some Scotch girl ?' 'If that is his photograph in the plush frame on the what-not, he *must* be handsome.' 'In a kilt, too ! So pictur-esque.' 'Clementina, your hat is all on one side.' 'Do put it straight for me, Ella, there's a dear !' 'I am sure I should have time for one look at that photo ; I can't see it from where I sit.' And old Lady Flamingo was so stout, and so hot, and so out of breath with getting out of her carriage, that she could only lean back on the sofa, fanning herself, and say : 'Be calm, my dears ; smile at him whenever he looks at you, and above all, *be natural*.' I peeped out just in time to see Ella—nasty spiteful thing !—put Clementina's hat much more on one side than it was before ; and the other girl was just bustling back from looking at Guy's picture, when mother came in. As soon as I could get out I rushed and warned Guy ; and we

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hid in the shrubbery and watched them drive away, looking awfully cross—didn't they, Guy? —and Guy said the old Flamingo had come out in her drawing-room curtains, because of the pattern, all big leaves and flowers, on that red satin thing she wore; and we nearly split with laughing at the thought of his marrying one of the *little* Flamingos—didn't we, Guy?"

Mrs. Mervyn and Guy had laughed heartily at Beryl's tirade. Gertrude had looked somewhat discomfited, and said reprovingly :

" Beryl, I wonder you could be so unlady-like as to hide behind a curtain when our visitors came in. Of course they must have seen you. And then to play the spy and eavesdropper, and repeat in this rude way their little remarks, which they would never have made if they had dreamt of anyone being there to overhear them. Really, I——"

" Come along, little one," Guy had said,

and the two went off together, leaving their sister to conclude her lecture at leisure.

But on this Sunday morning there was no escape for Guy. He was introduced to a host of charming people. There was Mrs. Fitzpatrick and her *four* daughters ; Mrs. Archibald Dawson and Miss Dawson ; Mrs. Frere and her niece, Miss Hope ; and, best of all, Lady Flamingo and the “three dear girls.” They quite obstructed the churchyard path, as they all stood chatting there ; and Lady Elaine had to go through the long grass, and over several mounds in order to pass them. She bowed coldly to those who noticed her, but did not attempt to join the group. Guy saw her, and his face flushed as he raised his hat ; but she went on with a mere passing bow, and no special look of recognition. Poor Guy ! It was scarcely worth the two hours of patient endurance he had gone through that morning. The Miss Flamingos made a dead set at him. They

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caught his eye, and then all smiled together, looking so excessively silly, that Guy smiled too, in spite of himself, and then plunged into some incoherent remark about the weather ; to which the dear girls replied by all smiling again, and saying how very sorry “mamma” and all of them were that Sir Guy was out when they paid a visit to Mervyn Hall the other day ; to which poor Guy—not being sufficiently well versed in the ways of society to know that, whatever the *truth* might be, the *correct* thing was to say how exceedingly sorry he was to miss them—only said : “Oh, were you ?” or something equally awkward ; and tried hard not to see the expressive pantomime, in which Beryl was informing him that the old Flamingo’s eye was upon him ! Just then Bidger pulled at his coat, evidently anxious to attract his attention ; and looking up, Guy saw Lady Elaine, who had paused when she reached the churchyard gate, and stood looking at him. She smiled

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as their eyes met, and in a moment Guy was at her side.

“Have you your carriage, Lady Elaine, or do you walk back?”

“Oh, I walk, as it is fine. Sir Guy. The nearest way lies through the fields.”

“May I escort you, Lady Elaine?”

She smiled. He had so evidently prepared his part of this little dialogue.

“Only for a little way, Sir Guy. I am afraid I am taking you from your people and —the Miss Flamingos.”

“Hang the Miss Flam—that is—I mean—aren’t they a silly lot, Lady Elaine?”  
(No doubt of *this* being spontaneous.)

“Very silly. I have always thought so, and do not cultivate their acquaintance; but I believe the whole neighbourhood considers them charming. By the way, Sir Guy, why did you not come with Mrs. Mervyn and your sisters to The Towers on Thursday? I made sure when they were announced I

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should find you with them. Do you know, I was really quite disappointed."

No answer. Guy's face was red as fire, and he nervously switched the long grass and dandelions with his cane.

"We made such friends last Monday in the wood," she went on. "Do you know, as the week went by, and you did not come and see me as you promised, it occurred to me that perhaps, on second thoughts, you had decided after all to be offended with me for lecturing you so mercilessly!"

Then Guy spoke.

"Offended, Lady Elaine? I offended with *you*! You can't have thought that. You don't know how I have been trying to follow your advice all the week, though it is precious difficult not to say strong things before ladies; because it's just ladies who do the sort of things that make a fellow—at least—no, I don't mean that: but you know, my sister Gertrude is confoundedly provoking

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sometimes ! Don't you think we might make her an exception ?"

" And me too ?"

" *You* ? No, Lady Elaine !"

" Then what do you call the adjective with which you emphasized ' provoking ' ?"

" Oh, hang it !" said poor Guy, looking really mortified. " It's no go ! You know what the Psalmist says, Lady Elaine ; you can't make a leopard change his skin, nor a silk purse out of a sow's ear ; so it is no use trying."

Lady Elaine laughed outright. How rarely that laugh was heard, so silvery, sweet, and ringing ; surely it might have made music in the dullest house. Then, seeing Guy was really vexed :

" My dear boy," she said, laying her hand lightly on his arm ; " you take it too much to heart. I was more than half in play the whole time ; and, do you know, I like you much better when you are your natural self

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—slang and all—than when you assume a manner which is not your own, and take such pains to talk correctly.”

Guy turned slowly, and looked at her. All the vexation died out of his face, and a merry smile shone there, as, putting on a broad Scotch accent: “Ay, but women are kittie cattle!” he said; “I might as well have listened to the sermon instead of spending the whole time deciding whether ‘escort you to your carriage’ sounded better than ‘convey you’ there.”

She laughed again, and shook her head at him.

“I am afraid you did not profit much, Sir Guy, by our respected Vicar’s most excellent advice. What was the text?”

“I have not a notion, Lady Elaine. I did not come to church to listen to the sermon. I abominate listening to sermons, and never do it, on principle.”

“Then why did you come to church?”

Guy hesitated one moment, then said quietly, "To see *you* again."

Lady Elaine gave him a rapid, penetrating glance. Was he like all the rest, after all? No: this was no pretty speech meant to please her, but evidently the honest truth, told rather against his will, and only because he would not evade her question, and could not truthfully give any other reply. And Lady Elaine was really pleased. Guy had burst like a warm bright sunbeam into her life—her cold sunless life; and forced her to let him shine on her, and warm her, and take her out of her usual reserve; and she had scarcely realized how much she was looking forward to meeting him again until his mother and sisters came to The Towers without him. So only boyish shyness had kept him away that day; and he had remembered his friend of the woods, and come to church solely to see her again. Yes, Lady Elaine was pleased, very pleased. And then she

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remembered that never once during the whole service had she met his eyes ; though she looked across at him often, and wondered if he had seen and recognised her ; and she said to herself, as she had said once or twice before, “Slang or no slang, he is every inch a gentleman.”

“ But you must come to church, in future, for a better reason than that, Sir Guy. And do leave Bidger at home next time ; for really I found it exceedingly hard to preserve a reverent and becoming demeanour when poor old Bones was attempting to eject him. You know it is not the custom in England for dogs to attend divine service.”

“ They do in Scotland,” said Guy. “ In a little church near us there are special seats, up in a sort of gallery, where all the dogs sit together in rows. They behave wonderfully well, unless a rat turns up ; when they throw decorum to the dev—— winds, I mean, and

have a general scrimmage. Shouldn't you like to see it?"

"But surely a rat is not very likely to 'turn up' in church?"

"So I thought; and the day I went I took one in my pocket. I sat near the gallery, and let him out right in the middle of the 'sermon,' and wasn't there a jolly row!"

"Sir Guy, I am afraid you are a very bad young man! Have you no reverence whatever in your composition?"

"I think I have, Lady Elaine, at least, for some things, and some people; but I hate cant and hypocrisy! Now, do you suppose the parson this morning was thinking in the least of what he was reading, half the time? I am certain he was not, or he would have read a bit differently. And all the people took the cue from him, and humdrummed through the whole performance, as something to be got through and done with. I don't believe anyone in that whole congrega-

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gation was honestly praying, excepting you, and my mother, and that queer old body in the white frilled cap sitting just under the pulpit."

" You are observant, Sir Guy, but judge rather harshly."

They walked on together a little way in silence. The poppies were nodding their red heads saucily among the wheat. Lady Elaine picked one in passing and looked deep into its crimson heart. Suddenly a thought struck her, and her fair face seemed to have caught a reflection from the poppy she still held, as turning to Guy she said :

" Tell me, Sir Guy : why did you think *I* was really praying in church this morning ?"

They had reached the stile near the cow-slip meadow. Guy was helping her over as she asked the question, and she paused on the step and looked down at him, awaiting his reply. He kept her hand in his for a moment, and looked up at her with his

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honest blue eyes ; then, with a bright smile, answered simply :

“ Because, Lady Elaine, I believe you to be as good and true as you are sweet and beautiful ; and I believe your prayers would be real, just as all else you do is real, and true, and good.”

“ But, Sir Guy, you are quite mistaken in me. I am not at all religious.”

“ Religious ?” said Guy ; “ I hope not, Lady Elaine ! I can’t abide religious people.”

“ But you really think a great deal too well of me. I often do things which are neither good nor true.”

“ I don’t believe it,” said Guy, squaring his shoulders determinedly, and looking up at her with an enthusiastic sparkle in his eyes. “ I don’t believe you ever did a wrong thing in your life ; and, what’s more, if I ever see you do a thing which I have always thought to be *wrong*, I shall consider it *right* from that moment.”

She looked at him earnestly.

“ You would have made a good Roman Catholic, Sir Guy.”

“ Why, Lady Elaine ?”

“ Never mind ; but you would. I must be careful how I act in your presence. Now help me down, and then not a step further must you come, or you will keep your mother waiting for luncheon. As it is, she will wonder what has become of you.”

“ Let me see you just as far as the park gate, Lady Elaine.”

“ No, not this morning. I shall get home quite safely ; I have never been waylaid but once, not so very long ago ! Now, if you turn up the lane there, and keep on to the right, you will find it a short cut to Mervyn Hall. Make good haste, and you will be there in ten minutes.”

“ All right,” said Guy, rather ruefully ; “ but may I send Bidger back with you ?”

“ No, thanks ; not even Bidger !”

“ Well, good-bye, Lady Elaine.”

“ Good-bye, Guy.”

Mrs. Mervyn was sitting in the garden, under the large chestnut tree. She looked up as he crossed the lawn.

“ Guy darling!”

“ Yes, mother dear. Am I late? I won’t be a minute.”

“ There is no hurry, Guy. The first gong has only just sounded. I want a word with you, dear boy, before you go in.”

He crossed the lawn, came and leant over the back of her garden chair, and kissed her tenderly.

“ What is it, mother mine? You look rather bothered.”

“ Darling, have you forgotten our talk the other night, and what we settled together then?”

Guy flushed. “ No, mother, I have not. But really, that was all more than half non-

sense. I think I got moonstruck that night. Forget it, to please me."

"Nevertheless, my son, I think we came to a wise conclusion, and one to which you had better keep."

"Really, no, mother. We are such friends, now ; and she thought it odd the other day, and I should feel such a fool if she met me and asked me again why I kept out of her way. It is all right. There's the gong ! I won't be long." And off he went.

How the birds did *sing* ; how the sun did *shine* ; and how glorious and beautiful everything looked on that Sunday afternoon. And Guy's pulses throbbed with exultation, and his heart sang also ; and the unconscious burden of its song was this : "She called me *Guy*, she called me *Guy*!"

As Lady Elaine walked slowly home, she said to herself : "Muriel was quite mistaken in her suggestion, and really rather foolish.

He is a thorough boy ; honest, simple, and outspoken, without a trace of nonsense about him. And what a noble nature ; manly and true, *true* to the very core!"

And then Lady Elaine fell to pondering, and pondered deeply upon many things. Is not our standard unconsciously *raised* when we meet with those who deem us nobler and better than we are ? Do we not long to become what they believe us, rather than let them ever know us as other than they think ?

Lady Elaine had neither entered into the prayers nor listened to the sermon ; but as she went to her room she felt the better for having been to church that morning.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE party at Mervyn Hall were all assembled in the drawing-room, an unusual occurrence at so early an hour in the afternoon, accounted for by a heavy thunder-storm, which had driven Guy and Bidger indoors, and brought Beryl down from the schoolroom, imploring protection from the “horrid lightning.” Mrs. Mervyn and Gertrude were starting for a walk when the storm commenced, and had now taken up some light fancy work to beguile the time, while waiting until it was over. Some people can never be seated in a drawing-room for an instant without immediately producing a crumpled, but interesting

looking little piece of work from some hidden receptacle, and diligently commencing to operate thereon. The habit is a good one, no doubt, but annoying to those who do not cultivate it, and who are made to appear idle by contrast.

Guy was putting a new first string to his violin. Beryl sat watching him with great interest, and—doing a sum.

“Where are you and Gerty going, mother?” asked Guy presently.

“To the village, dear—when this storm is over—to pay a few little visits at the cottages.”

“What sort of people are the poor about here?”

“Very different to our old Scotch bodies at home; but pleasant and respectable enough, most of them.”

“Any queer characters?”

“We have not come upon many at present.”

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“Tell Guy about old Mrs. Doles, mother,” said Gertrude.

“Who is she?” asked Guy.

Mrs. Mervyn smiled. “Not a very delightful specimen, dear. An old woman with a wonderful talent for grumbling. Gerty went to see her, and came back rather disheartened and quite indignant, declaring that it was impossible to start any topic of conversation which she did not somehow manage to make an occasion for complaint. Next time we were together in the village, we called at her cottage. She certainly did grumble quite as much as Gerty had described; but I felt sure that I had in reserve one subject which even old Mrs. Doles could not turn into a cause for complaint. I had ascertained that she has a most excellent old husband—steady, kind-hearted, hard-working—in fact, all that can be desired. So towards the end of our visit, with a glance at Gerty, I said: ‘Well, Mrs. Doles, you cer-

tainly seem to have had an unusual amount of trouble, but, though times are hard, and your rheumatics bad, and your pig has turned out rather a failure, and your daughter-in-law certainly has not behaved so well as she might, still, you have one thing for which to be very thankful. I hear God has given you a very good husband.' 'Yes,' said the old woman, 'he *might* be worse;' and her face brightened a little, but fell again almost immediately, as she added impressively: 'Ah, mum, but I am *sure* to be a *widder* soon.'"

Guy laughed long and loud. "Poor mother! So Gerty won the wager. What a pleasing specimen, to be sure! I'll be bound she is not the old woman I noticed in church on Sunday."

"Oh no, she never goes to church," said Gertrude. "If you ask her to do so, she shakes her head, and says she will 'be carried there, feet foremost, *quite* soon enough, God

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A'mighty knows ; but she ain't a-going before her time, not to please nobody ; and as for parson, where's the good of going to hear a man preach about charity and such like, who does nothing for a poor old body, from year's end to year's end, except perhaps a shilling a week, and a bit of tea and sugar, and a flannel petticoat at Christmas—which shrank awful in the washing first time, miss—and a dinner from the Vicarage sometimes (*few* and *far* between), which is colder when they gets here than parson would like to eat himself, miss!—and so on till you leave."

"What an old caution!" said Guy.  
"When I give Christmas-boxes to our tenants this year, I shall send her a French halfpenny with a hole in it, and perhaps for once she will be too astonished to grumble!"

"But who is your old woman, Guy?"

"She sat just under the pulpit on Sunday, with a white frilled cap on ; a shrivelled old face, like parchment, and the colour of Cad-

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bury's cocoa, but with a sort of happy shine about it. The old girl looked to me as though she had found a piece of good news in her Bible, and smiled every time she thought of it."

"Oh! I know," put in Beryl, "that must have been old 'Many Mussies.' We call her so, because her favourite sentence is: 'But the dear Lord 'as sent me many, many mussies.' Mercies she means, you know, Guy; and if ever she speaks of anything which has gone wrong with her, she always says in the same breath: 'but, thank the Lord, I've a many, many mussies to be thankful for; and the parson he's a dear good man; not but what 'tis true I don't get so much help out of him o' Sundays as my old soul needs; but then I have m' Bible and good sight, thank the Lord (eighty-four, come next October, and never no glasses have I used), and many's the time his hot dinners have kept soul and body together.'

for me; ay, my dear, I've many, many mussels.''"

"Well, she's a cheery old party, at all events," said Guy.

"What gossips all the people are, mother!" remarked Gertrude presently. "Old Mrs. Cibble hinted all sorts of things to me about Lady Elaine at The Towers."

"Confound her impudence!" said Guy hotly. "What do you mean?"

"Please don't swear when you address me, Guy. Did you hear anything about it, mother?"

"Well, yes, dear, something; but I do not think it well to listen to gossip about our neighbours, still less to repeat it."

"But one can't help hearing when they talk; and certainly we ought to know if things are not as they should be at The Towers."

Guy opened his mouth to retort, but a look from his mother checked him; and

bending over his fiddle, he began screwing up the peg in silence.

“And they say,” continued Gertrude after a pause, “that Lady Elaine and Mr. Monk do not get on well together; that he leads her a most miserable life, and sometimes actually ill-uses her.”

Snap went Guy’s violin string. “Oh, Guy dear, what a pity!” cried Beryl. “Why did you give it such a twist?”

“Hang it!” said Guy; then throwing the broken string across to Gertrude: “There, miss! Please to tie up your tattling tongue with that, and don’t bring scurrilous village gossip into my house again!”

A cautious, deferential cough at the door, and Lawford entered with a note for Mrs. Mervyn.

“From The Towers, madam. Her ladyship’s footman has just brought it over.”

Mrs. Mervyn broke the seal, and glanced at the contents.

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“He need not wait, Lawford; we will send the answer.”

Gertrude had dissolved into indignant tears; silently, behind a paper, while Lawford was in the room; but now openly, and in a gradual crescendo of sobs. Guy still looked hot and angry. Beryl, her face hidden behind her slate, appeared deep in her sums, and was whispering energetically: “Seven times eight are sixty-four, put down six and carry four—nine from five, you can’t—nine from fifteen—one, two, three, four, five.”

Mrs. Mervyn glanced from one to the other; then read her note again, and laid it down on the table.

“Beryl, my child, you are not thinking of your sums; take them back to the school-room, dear; and as soon as they are finished you may go into the garden.”

Beryl left the room with a sigh. Guy reached across the table, took up Lady

Elaine's note, and read it. That was not quite like Guy.

"THE TOWERS,  
"June 16th, 18—.

"DEAR MRS. MERVYN,

"It will give Mr. Monk and myself great pleasure if you and your daughter and Sir Guy Mervyn will dine with us on the 23rd, at 7.45.

"Believe me,

"Sincerely yours,

"ELAINE MONK."

Guy laid the note down, and walked over to the window. Gertrude's sobs continued; but, as his back was turned, she put down her handkerchief, and tried to see what was on the paper without leaving her place. Presently Guy turned, and came back to the table.

"Gerty," he said, "I am sorry I spoke so

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roughly to you just now ; shake hands, and make it up."

" Well, I forgive you, Guy," said Gertrude, ignoring his outstretched hand. " I forgive you ; but I shall not be able to forget your cruel words so easily. And I should like to know what it matters to you whether Lady Elaine squabbles with her husband or not ?"

" That is right, my dear boy," put in Mrs. Mervyn quickly, before Guy had time to answer. " And now, if you please, Gertrude, we will not renew the argument ; but I must just say that I entirely agree with Guy as to it being undesirable either to listen to or repeat village gossip about our neighbours or anyone else. It is generally untrue, and always exaggerated ; and, in such a matter, it is a golden rule to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. Now, Gerty, the sun has been shining brilliantly for the last quarter of an hour, and the air is de-

liciously cool after the storm ; let us start at once."

" And of course you will accept that invitation, mother ?"

" Yes, Guy—for myself and Gerty ; but you know you have asked Mr. Tristram here that evening, to play those duets over with you."

" Oh, bother Tristram ! He can come any time ; so accept it for me too, mother. And, if you like, I will ride over with the note ; I have nothing special to do this afternoon."

" No, thanks, dear ; James can go quite well. And if you have nothing special to do this afternoon, I wish you would give a little time to superintending the laying-out of those new flower-beds. Frost does not keep to our plans if left entirely to himself."

So when Bidger awoke from a short afternoon nap, he found the drawing-room deserted. He got up slowly, shook himself, and looked around. Guy's violin lay on the

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ottoman close by, and near it, on the floor, the broken violin-string, flung indignantly back by Gertrude, and the pink-tinted envelope from The Towers. Bidger snuffed first at one and then at the other, with an anxious, pensive expression in his intelligent dog-eyes; perhaps he was wondering how Guy came to break his violin-string. Then, having come to some satisfactory conclusion on this point, he wagged his tail wisely, picked up Lady Elaine's envelope in his mouth, and trotted out of the room.

Five minutes later the little pink envelope lay in Guy's waistcoat-pocket; and Bidger bounded about among the flower-beds, in conscious pride at having done a good and clever thing.

## CHAPTER V.

SUNDRY strange noises proceeded from Sir Guy's bedroom, on the evening of the 23rd of June. Much stamping, and banging, and opening and shutting of drawers ; then a short interval of perfect silence ; then a muffled "*Confound it !*" and more stamping and banging.

Presently up came Gertrude's French maid, and tapped at the door.

"Pardon, Sair Guy ; mais Mademoiselle Gertrude désire vous faire rappeler que sa chambre est située juste en-dessous——"

"Walker !" yelled Guy. And Eugénie went down again, and informed Gertrude, with evident pleasure, that : "Sair Guy a tout simplement dit 'warkair.'"

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Beryl next appeared upon the scene, and after listening intently at the door for a minute, and making an inspection through the keyhole, knocked energetically.

“Allez au—ciel!” shouted Guy, who was evidently not in the best of tempers.

“It’s only me, Guy dear. What is the matter? May I come in?”

“Come in, Berry, do. It’s this beastly tie!”

Beryl entered promptly, and realized that she stood on a field of battle; and a field of battle strewn with slain. White ties, more or less crumpled, lay in every corner, flung away in desperation; two or three on the bed, and several trampled under foot near the dressing-table. Guy, in dress-clothes and spotless shirt-front, hot, flushed, and exhausted, stood amid the havoc, the picture of despair.

“The beastly things won’t tie,” he explained. “Either one end sticks up or the

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other, or there's no proper middle, or too much of it, or the whole vile thing goes awry!"

"Poor darling," said Beryl sympathetically. "But oh, Guy dear, *how* nice your hair looks! You have parted it just exactly right, and it *is* so curly and nice. Very few men have real curly hair; and when they do, it is generally stiff and scrubby like a hearth-brush; but yours is so soft and wavy."

This had a decidedly calming, comforting effect; and Guy became more composed, which was the very thing Beryl intended.

"Well, the parting was a fluke, Berry," he said modestly; "it came right first try, not like those awful ties. I say! It's nearly seven. What shall we do?"

Berry had been bustling about, collecting all the castaways, and now stood with a large bunch in her hand, and considered.

"Have you any left, Guy?"

Guy dived into the drawer.

“ Yes, three.”

“ Three ! Well, we must not waste those. I’ll tell you what, Guy ; I have a bright idea. I’ll go and ask Lawford to come up and help. I’ve often noticed how beautifully he ties his in the evening.”

“ No, no !” said Guy ; “ I can’t go with a tie like a *butler’s*.”

Beryl considered again, and, as if to gain inspiration, commenced counting the spoils she held in her hand. “ Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—I know, Guy ! There is that photograph Gerty has of the new curate at Granton. He wears a lovely tie. I will run and borrow the photo from Gerty, and try and copy it !”

“ But I can’t go with a tie like a *curate’s* !” objected Guy.

“ Well then, dear, there is nothing for it but for me to try my best ; so sit down on the *lowest* chair, please, and keep very still, and I’ll begin. At least it will be an original tie, for I never did one before.”

Anxious suspense. Then :

“ Berry, how is it getting on ?”

“ Splendidly.”

“ Is it nearly done ?—for my head will come off if I have to hold it much longer in this position !”

“ Very nearly. There, Guy ! Now look ! Isn’t it perfect ?”

“ Capital, Berry ; you’re a brick ! But—don’t you think it’s just a little full in the middle ?”

“ Why, that’s its chief beauty, Guy. I pulled it out like that on purpose. It looks so nice, and so uncommon.”

“ Lawford does not do his so,” said Guy, still rather doubtful.

“ Oh, but you specially said it must not be a tie like a butler’s. No, leave it alone, Guy, you will spoil it ; it can’t be improved ; and mind, if Lady Elaine remarks on its beauty, you tell her I tied it. Now I shall stop and watch you finish. May I ?”

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“ Certainly, little one.”

Berry perched herself on the foot of the bed, and watched his every movement with anxious interest.

“ Guy, do you know, while I was so close to you just now, I could see your moustache coming, quite plainly. I think you’ll have a beauty before long.”

“ Nonsense,” said Guy, laughing.

“ But,” continued Beryl seriously; “ I do hope you won’t begin to twirl it before it is long enough. Percy Flamingo has a little one, about as long as your eyebrows, which he is forever twirling. I always think it looks as though he was trying to make it grow long before its time.”

“ Little jackass !” said Guy.

“ By the way, dear, when you dined at the Flamingos’ the other night, how did you manage your tie ?”

“ Oh, I did it myself all right ! It did not matter that night.”

"Then why does it so specially matter to-night?"

"To-night is more important."

"Why, Guy?"

"Now, really, Berry, I can't answer so many questions."

"I wonder if she will notice it?" said Beryl half to herself. "If she does, I hope she will guess I tied it for my boy.—I wonder who you will take in, Guy? Someone nice and pretty, I hope. Are you sure you know what to do?"

"I am sure I don't," said Guy.

"Well, I have looked it all out in Gerty's book on etiquette, and in Mrs. Beeton, and 'Enquire Within'; so I can coach you exactly. Now do stand still and listen, Guy dear; for I want you to show off to advantage, and be admired by Lady Elaine and everybody. First, you must be sure to *keep your eye on your hostess*, in order to see at once when she signs to you who to take in. Do

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you think you shall remember to do that, Guy?"

"Well, what next, Berry?"

"Then, when she says to you: 'Sir Guy Mervyn, will you take in Miss So-and-So?' you must say 'Most happy,' and walk towards Miss So-and-So, and make a little bow when you get to her. Then you must give her your *right* arm—don't forget which, Guy (you can remember it by this, the *right* arm is the right one to give)—lay your left hand gracefully on your heart, and trot her out."

"Oh, bother!" said Guy, "I shall never remember all this."

"Oh, but you must, dear! Then, on the way to the dining-room, you must make some 'light and pleasing conversation' to amuse your partner; but don't do it like the cheese young man."

"Who was he?"

"Why, Guy, don't you know that story?

He was a very shy young man, and all he could think of to say to the girl he took in was: 'Do you like cheese?' She said 'No.' But it was some way yet to the dining-room, so his next venture was: 'Does your brother like cheese?' She said: 'I have no brother.' 'If you had a brother,' said the shy young man, 'do you think he would like cheese?' Clever, wasn't it?"

"Now, look here, Berry," said Guy, laughing; "I believe you are telling me all these things just to confuse me. But, seriously, are you sure about the arm?"

"Quite sure, Guy. The books all differed about everything else, but they all agreed upon that. So don't forget: the right arm, and the other to be *left* alone! Now you can't make a mistake. And the etiquette book says: 'A neat, timely and appropriate remark should be made on taking your partner in'; so, as it is the middle of June, I should think 'Do you skate?' would be

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just the thing. Now, Guy dear, you look splendidly handsome — so tall, and quite grown up. Come down to the conservatory, and I will choose you a flower for your button-hole ; and promise me, darling, not to flirt to-night ; for everyone will be falling in love with you, and I shall be so jealous."

"Nonsense, little woman, you never need be jealous of anyone," and he put his arm lovingly round her shoulders.

"Well, I am proud of my boy to-night. Look, Guy, a little white rosebud and some maidenhair ; just the thing. Let me put it in. There ! mother is calling in the hall. Good-bye, darling. Slip up to my room when you come back ; I shall stay awake to hear all about it. Oh, Guy ! you do look so nice ; it's all my white tie ! Don't forget the right arm. Good-bye !"

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"Mrs. and Miss Mervyn, and Sir Guy Mervyn," announced the old butler at The

Towers, in confidential tones ; and Lady Elaine advanced to greet them. She had always seemed beautiful to Guy, but to-night the sight of her dazzled and bewildered him, and made his heart beat quickly.

Was it possible that this queenly figure, sweeping so gracefully towards them, bidding them welcome with such stately dignity, was the same Lady Elaine whom he had helped over stiles and chatted to about fishing and shooting, and horses, and all his home affairs in such very free and easy style ? Poor boy ! He had never before experienced the transforming effect of an evening gown upon a really beautiful woman. Dazzlingly lovely she looked to poor Guy, who already held her fairest among women ; and yet, as she stood for a moment talking with them, he felt there was a change in her manner to-night—he missed the sweet friendliness which had always put him so thoroughly at his ease ; and a certain restraint and formality in her

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way of speaking made him understand why Gertrude called her “that stiff Lady Elaine.” But Guy said to himself: “She is not like herself to-night. Something has troubled her;” and with this thought in his mind, he noticed the weary look in her face, carefully concealed though it was beneath one of cold and rather haughty indifference to all things around her.

Mrs. Mervyn and Gertrude soon found friends amongst the assembled guests; but Guy still stood alone and slightly apart, when a voice at his elbow made him start and turn abruptly.

“Sir Guy Mervyn, I believe? Our first meeting, Sir Guy. Glad to see you here this evening.”

Guy turned, and found himself face to face with the master of the house, Lady Elaine’s husband; a short thick-set man, well over fifty; broad-shouldered, dark, and sallow; his black bushy beard and moustache did not

hide his full sensual lips ; and, when he smiled, Guy noticed the white pointed teeth, which gave an almost wolfish expression of cruelty to his face. And yet some people might have called Mr. Monk a handsome man, until they chanced to catch that expression, half sensual, half cruel, which to a pure, true soul rendered his face unutterably revolting. Guy, as he looked at him, asked himself wonderingly, “ How did she—so good, so sweet, so beautiful—ever come to marry such a man ? ”

Again Guy stood alone. Everyone had arrived, and he began to wonder anxiously whom he would have to take in to dinner. He saw Lady Elaine introducing people right and left, and every moment he expected his turn to come. Then he began to remember Beryl’s instructions, and tried to consider what he would say on the way to the dining-room ; but the one sentence which would persistently return to his mind, to the

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exclusion of every other, was : “ Do you like cheese ? Does your brother like cheese ? ” Dinner was announced. Mr. Monk led off with Lady Anstruther, portly, proud, and powdered, wife of the county M.P. Other couples followed one by one, and Guy completely lost his head, and vainly tried to remember which was his right arm. Every instant he expected to hear Lady Elaine call upon him to take in Miss So-and-So ; and the one thing which kept helplessly running through his brain was : “ Does your brother like cheese ? ” But no ! Everyone seemed pairing off. Was he to take in no one ? The last couple passed out, and he found himself standing alone beside Lady Elaine. Then she turned to him, with the kind smile he had missed at first : “ Well, Sir Guy, will you take me in ? ” He remembered which was his right arm then, and forgot all about the cheese ! How proud and happy he felt, as her hand rested on his coat-sleeve.

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He did not know she had given him the place of special honour ; he did not think of himself at all, but only of *her* ; and how, in the midst of this large, grand dinner party, she had smiled at him as sweetly as among the poppies in Farmer Hurst's wheatfield. And Guy held his young head high, and all his awkward shyness passed entirely away.

As they went along the hall, and through the long oak corridor : " Do you know, Lady Elaine," he said, " I had been dreading the thought of having to take a lady in to-night. I little guessed who it would be."

She smiled, and leaned a little towards him.

" I want you to talk for two at dinner, Guy ; for I am out of spirits this evening, and my guests must not think me dull. I am so tired."

" I thought you looked so," he said gently. " I will do my best, Lady Elaine."

## CHAPTER VI.

DINNER had commenced. Guy, seated at Lady Elaine's left hand, had on his left an old lady, Mrs. Joram by name, who had stayed for some time in Scotland, not far from Guy's old home. They thus found something in common at once, and immediately made great friends. The subject above all others over which Guy was most enthusiastic just then was his dearly-loved Highland mountains and glens. He and Mrs. Joram soon found out that they knew and admired many of the same places, and began comparing notes about them ; and he was soon talking away merrily, keeping their end of the table thoroughly amused

with quaint Scotch stories of queer characters he had known in his old home. Lady Elaine smiled to herself as she noticed how perfectly natural he was, and how entirely unconscious of the impression he was making, and of the open admiration bestowed upon him by all the ladies at their end of the table. She herself was a little surprised at his turning out so bright and amusing and full of conversation, until she remembered her request to him, and his quiet "I will do my best." And her heart warmed towards this kind-hearted young fellow, whose first thought always seemed for others. Lady Elaine was growing very fond of Guy.

And Guy, whenever he looked at her, thought of four lines in one of his favourite songs :

" Her brow is like the snaw-drift,  
    Her neck is like the swan ;  
    Her face it is the fairest  
        That e'er the sun shone on."

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Then Dr. Bell said Mrs. Totman & I  
picked up her handkerchief. I must near  
the end of that chapter think and what are  
these big voices he found it very difficult to  
hear.

Then Mr. Bell said Dr. Bell nothing. He had  
seen the book at the library but had  
written as he was in great but not quite  
good significant things so Dr. Bell said  
misinterpretation. He understood it was  
the old man to the end of the first  
chapter something of which Mr. Bell said  
as far as he could see that Dr. Bell did not  
see much of it.

Mr. Bell said Dr. Bell you have however a  
good memory so I think we may have  
misinterpretation. Dr. Bell said that is  
all right.

Mr. Bell said Dr. Bell you have however a  
good memory so I think we may have  
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Mr. Bell said Dr. Bell you have however a  
good memory so I think we may have  
misinterpretation. Dr. Bell said that is  
all right.

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undoubted talents, so perfectly natural and so charmingly frank. Were you not amused when silly little Grace Liston chaffed him for drinking nothing but water, and wanted to know if he was a total abstainer on principle; and he quietly answered: 'Not at all. I shall take wine when I come to need it; at present I find I thrive very well on pure water.' By the way, Elaine, between ourselves, I wish we could have brought him out with us, and not left him there."

Lady Elaine sighed, and presently crossed the room and took a vacant chair beside Guy's mother.

"Have you heard from Cyril Branscome, Mrs. Mervyn?"

"Yes, Lady Elaine; we received an answer from him last week—a nice straightforward letter. And this morning came replies from his referees in answer to my letters of inquiry."

"Satisfactory, I hope?"

"Entirely so. I must say I consider him somewhat young for the post ; but my son is greatly taken with his letter, and will not hear of having anyone else."

"He must be about six-and-twenty," said Lady Elaine. "He took orders two years ago. When does he come to you ?"

"Next week, most probably. I am much obliged to you for having recommended him to us."

There was a coldness about Mrs. Mervyn's manner which chilled Lady Elaine ; more especially as she divined the cause, and fore-saw that she would soon lose these new friends, just as she had lost nearly all she would have cared to know. After a few passing remarks, she rose and moved away.

The door opened, and Guy came in alone. His face was flushed, and his hand trembled violently, as he closed the door behind him. He was greeted with acclamation by those who noticed his entrance.

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“Why, Sir Guy, you honour and flatter us greatly !”

“Oh, but,” said little Grace Liston, “wine has no attractions for Sir Guy ; and perhaps there was no pure water to be had !”

He found himself seated near Mrs. Joram.

“Now for the end of our story,” she said, leaning towards him. “What did Mac do when he found it was all a joke ?”

Lady Elaine came up to them.

“Sir Guy,” she said quietly, “will you come through to the conservatory with me ? I want to show you the white azalea we were talking of.”

“Not just now,” he answered, without looking up ; “I am in the midst of telling Mrs. Joram a story.”

“When you have finished, then !” she said gently, in no way resenting his seeming rudeness.

“Go at once, Sir Guy,” said Mrs. Joram. “Our story will keep.”

So he rose, and followed Lady Elaine.

The conservatory at The Towers was only separated from the drawing-room by glass doors and a heavy crimson curtain. To-night it was brilliantly lighted. They passed along in silence through glorious masses of bloom--beneath arches of passion-flower and purple clematis. The air was heavy with fragrance ; the whole place seemed to Guy like fairyland.

At the furthest end of the conservatory stood the azalea.

Lady Elaine stopped before it, trembling with suppressed emotion.

“ Guy, what has happened ? Tell me. What did they say ? ”

His brow darkened.

“ I cannot tell you, Lady Elaine.”

“ But I wish to hear. Is it too bad to repeat to me ? ”

“ Anything *bad* would be too bad to repeat to *you*,” he said.

“Was it because of low talk that you left the room?”

“No,” he muttered. “I might have sat through that, for once, beastly though it was!”

“Then what else?”

“Don’t ask me,” he cried passionately, “for I will not tell you, Lady Elaine!”

“Then I will tell you,” she said, with forced calmness. “It was when you heard *my* name brought in by my own husband, and mixed up with vile talk and low slander.”

He turned away his head.

“I knew it, Guy, the moment you came in. But tell me, quick; what did you do then?”

“I don’t know. I think I lost my head. I said something hot and strong—but what, I can’t remember—and then came away.”

“Oh, Guy!” she said; and then an uncontrollable sob of shame and pain broke her

voice, and for a moment she turned from him.

Then, as she saw how the righteous anger and indignation was burning in his young heart, “Guy,” she said, “there is one thing I wish you to know. He would not have done it unless—— Perhaps you would not think it, but all this evening he has been the worse for——you understand? Whatever he may be to me in private, he is courteous to his guests, unless—— Oh, Guy! So now even you know something of the sorrow, the misery, the curse, of my sad life.”

Her lips quivered; then, laying her hand on his arm:

“Do you pity and despise me for it, Guy?”

“Despise you for it?” he cried. “No, Lady Elaine!” Then, with his eyes shining, he said gently: “Next only to my mother, I honour you, and hold you highest of all living women.” And he bent and pressed

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his lips to her hand. But, as he raised his head, he saw brown sinewy fingers close round her soft white arm, and starting up—there stood Mr. Monk beside them.

“And so, my lady,” he said, with his wolfish smile, “and so your last tame pet is young Sir Simon Pure!” and he gripped her arm with cruel force.

She gave one little gasping cry, but did not answer.

The hot blood flew to Guy’s face.

“You brute!” he cried. “Were it not for her presence, and that this is your own house, by heaven, I’d knock you down!”

Mr. Monk quietly took the fan out of Lady Elaine’s hand, and, with another smile, deliberately struck the young man across the cheek with it.

Guy staggered back and turned ashy white; then, with an oath, sprang forward, and raised his arm. But in an instant Lady

Elaine's cold trembling fingers clung round his clenched hand.

“*Go,*” she cried, “for my sake!” but in the quivering tones of one who scarce dares hope to be obeyed.

And, without another word, Guy turned and went.

## CHAPTER VII.

As one in a dream, Guy made his way out of the conservatory. Past the cool splashing fountain, under the passion-flower arches, on he went, half blinded with rage, half stunned with shame ; at first only helplessly repeating to himself : “ For her sake, for her sake ! ”

But when he reached the velvet curtain he paused, and strove to regain his composure before entering the crowded drawing-room. All was silent behind him. No doubt Lady Elaine and—and that *beast* would go out some other way. Guy leaned his burning forehead against a cold marble pillar and tried to think.

So he had been *struck* ; he — Guy

Mervyn; struck in the face by a man he had only known two hours, in Lady Elaine's presence, and with Lady Elaine's *fan*. It was not a violent blow, and could scarcely have marked his cheek; but that only served to make the insult greater and more intensely humiliating; and when he remembered the sneer which accompanied the blow, Guy ground his teeth with fury. The Mervyns were ever a proud race, and this last young baronet was as proud as any. And then—oh! crowning shame of all!—he had not returned it; he had not taught the blackguard to think twice another time before he struck a Mervyn; but had meekly turned away like a—like a—coward—

“No!” said a voice, deep down in his heart; “like a *true lover*; like Lancelot, bravest of knights, who was ever ‘love-loyal to the least wish of his Queen.’ Where was the shame of doing what she asked, and asked with tears?” And as Guy thought of

those trembling fingers laid on his, and of the look of thankful surprise in her face as he turned away, his anger melted and he grew calm, and was almost glad at having had this opportunity of showing her what he would do for her sweet sake.

Ay—he loved her. He was almost startled himself to-night at the vehement passionate love he knew was in his heart for Lady Elaine. It had grown tenfold since the terrible knowledge had come to him of what a sad, loveless life hers was. Why should he not love her, since the one man who owned the exclusive right to love and worship her cared nothing for her, but treated her as he had just seen, and dared to talk of her as—“Oh! confound the brute!” said Guy; and unable longer to bear his own thoughts, he raised the curtain, and went into the drawing-room.

His mother saw him enter, and beckoned him to her, where she sat, a little apart.

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“Where have you been all this time, Guy?”

“In the conservatory, mother.”

“I thought you went there with Lady Elaine?”

“Yes. She asked me to go and see a new white azalea; but Mr. Monk soon joined us, and I returned alone. I waited about in the cool near the entrance by myself for a little while; this room is so hot.”

“Guy, what is the matter with your cheek? Have you knocked it?”

“Only a slight blow, mother; nothing to hurt;” and with a smile, light and careless, he joined a group of acquaintances standing by.

Guy had never before gone so near deceiving his mother.

Looking up the next moment, he saw Lady Elaine enter through an ante-room. She looked perfectly calm and collected, showing no signs of agitation beyond a

certain nervous way of clasping her fan tightly with both hands.

“Mr. Monk has gone down to the billiard-room,” she said, “and will be glad to see any gentlemen there who wish for a game.”

The invitation was very generally accepted, at least by the men staying in the house ; but Guy heard one or two near him say something about “rather queer manners.” Then there was a general move to go and see the conservatory ; and Guy went also, and soon found himself standing with the rest before the very same azalea. He was behind, in the shadow ; but, suddenly looking up, his eyes met Lady Elaine’s. One long look passed between them. Then Lady Elaine picked one of the white flowers, and placed it with the rose she wore at her breast ; and turning to him said carelessly : “Would you like one, Sir Guy ?” and picked and gave him one. And Guy threw away Berry’s little rose, and put the white

azalea in his button-hole instead ; and his heart glowed with joy and pride at the thought that he and she had a private understanding about those flowers, known only to themselves.

But afterwards his conscience smote him as he remembered the pleasure with which Berry had chosen the rose for him and placed it in his coat ; so he went back privately and found her little rose again, and put it in his pocket.

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All was over, and the Mervyns were driving swiftly back to Mervyn Hall.

They had been amongst the first to take their departure. Gertrude had most of the conversation to herself on the way home, and commented volubly upon every little incident of the evening.

“ And just fancy,” she said at length, “ Guy taking in Lady Elaine ; and so many other gentlemen there who must have expected to

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do so! Why, there was an M.P., and many others much more important than Guy. I *was* surprised! However, I suppose a baronet takes precedence, even over members of Parliament. I will look in my etiquette book when we get home. Still I think it was very odd of Lady Elaine; for you know, Guy, you are little more than a boy yet, after all. Oh, you need not laugh and wink at mamma! Others beside myself thought it not quite the thing. I heard Mrs. Algernon Biscoe remark to Miss Pringle, when you went off to the conservatory: 'How Lady Elaine does flirt with that young baronet.'"

"Gertrude," said Mrs. Mervyn sharply, "I must again request you not to repeat all the foolish remarks you hear made."

"But, mamma——"

"Be silent, Gertrude."

Gerty sighed—a sigh expressive of surprise, pity, and reproof; then murmured gently:

"Dear mamma, what *can* have so put you out?"

"Come, Gerty, no cheek!" said Guy, speaking for the first time. "And you need not speculate any more as to why I had the honour of taking in Lady Elaine. It was for a very simple reason, which you will not find in your etiquette book, but which I have no objection to your knowing. Lady Elaine was feeling very tired to-night, and not inclined for much talking; so she went in with me in preference to anyone more important. That is the long and short of the matter."

"Indeed!" said Gertrude, "and she actually told you so! How very confidential and intimate you and Lady Elaine have become! And perhaps she asked you to talk for two?"

"Just so," said Guy.

"Well, I must say you did it very well. There seemed perpetual amusement at your

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end of the table, and nearly all the laughter appeared to be over your stories ; and, from the little I overheard, they did not seem quite so vulgar as usual."

"Qualified praise, Miss Gerty ! Well, never mind. I dare say, next time we dine at The Towers, I shall take in the Vicar's plainest daughter, for whom you so decidedly booked me this afternoon."

"We shall never dine there again," said Mrs. Mervyn, "and never should have done so, had I known what sort of people they were. I do not suppose you noticed it, Guy, but Mr. Monk took considerably more than was good for him at dinner ; and afterwards several of his friends were in the same condition. I shall never think of dining there again, or allowing either of you to do so."

"Well, I always said——" remarked Gerty, but just then the footman threw open the brougham door, Guy sprang out, and lost the conclusion of Gerty's remark.

“Good-night, my dear boy. Go up quietly, or you will wake Beryl. Do you hear, Gerty? Don’t talk as you pass Berry’s room, and make haste to bed; it is half-past eleven.”

Guy detained his sister for a moment at the foot of the stairs.

“Gerty,” he said, as he gave her her candlestick; “don’t go into mother’s room to talk, or bother her any more to-night. I can see something has troubled her.”

“And I can see *what!*” said Gerty significantly. “Guy, you are beginning early! But I must say I felt a little proud of you to-night. You really looked very nice, and were much less awkward than I expected.”

“Thanks.”

“Oh, and by the way, Guy, talking of looking nice, did you happen to overhear any remarks made about *me*?”

“Well, yes, I did. After dinner I heard

the great M.P., who sat opposite you, remark to the gentleman who took you in : ' What a wonderful———'"

" Well ? Go on. What a wonderful what ?"

" I really don't think I ought to tell you, Gerty."

" Oh, do, Guy dear ; and I will tell you all sorts of nice things Mrs. Joram said about you."

" Well, the great M.P. said to the gentleman who took you in———"

" Go on, Guy ; you told me that before—and why are you backing into the library ? What did he say ?"

" ' What a wonderful appetite that Miss Mervyn has got ! ' "

Gerty made a dash at him : but only hurt her nails on the library door as he double-locked it on the inside.

But presently, hearing a sound strongly resembling mortified weeping, his conscience

smote him, and he came out—only to receive a sharp box on the ear.

“Never mind, Gerty,” he said. “Look what lots of grease you are spilling! I only wanted to score off you a little.”

“Guy, it was brutal! But did he, really?—oh, oh!”

“No, he really didn’t! What he really said, was: ‘A very pretty girl you had by you, Broughton!’ And your friend said: ‘Yes, charming. Should like to know her better.’”

“Are you sure that was it, Guy?”

“Quite sure. Now come on, Gerty; I hear mother whispering loudly over the banisters. Make haste up. Good-night.”

“Good-night, you *wretch*!”

Five minutes later, when all was quiet, Guy opened his door and stole noiselessly out, minus his boots and the azalea, and with the little faded white rose back in his button-hole. He crept along the passage until he reached a room, the door of which stood

slightly ajar. He pushed it open, and groped his way in.

“ Guy darling, is that you ?”

“ Yes, little one. So you really stopped awake ?”

“ Of course I did, Guy ! But what an age you have been ! Come and sit on my bed. For goodness’ sake don’t knock up against anything, or make a noise ! That’s right. Now tell me all about it. Did you look nice all the evening ? Did Lady Elaine think so ? How was she dressed ? Did you have ices—lemon, strawberry, or vanilla ? Oh, and *who* did you take in ? Make haste, Guy ; tell me *everything* !”

“ Well, to begin with your last question, I took in Lady Elaine.”

“ Oh, Guy !” Berry gave a shriek of delight, and frantically muffled it under the bedclothes ; then came up gasping : “ Oh, my own dear boy, how splendid ! And after Gerty snubbing me for saying

perhaps you would take Mrs. Biscoe, and putting you down for that second Drawler girl! Oh, how lovely! Why, Guy, it was *the* place of honour! If only I had been there to see! I really begin to like Lady Elaine, for knowing that my boy is better than everyone else. And did you remember which arm, Guy? And did you tread on her tail?"

"No. I trod on no one's tail, except Gerty's in getting into the carriage; and I caught it for that. And I remembered everything you told me—especially that beastly story about the cheese. I could think of nothing else to say, until I knew I was to take in Lady Elaine."

"And did you ask her if she liked cheese?"

"No, I didn't."

"What did you say to her?"

"Oh, I don't remember. All sorts of things."

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“Will you manage to remember by to-morrow, and tell me then?”

“Perhaps. I’ll see.”

“And did she admire your tie, Guy?”

“I dare say; but she didn’t mention it, and I forgot to tell her you tied it.”

“And did she look pretty, Guy?”

“Lovely! I never saw anyone so exquisitely lovely before.”

Guy laid his head on the pillow with a sigh. A soft little hand came up and stroked his cheek.

“And was she nice to you, darling?”

“Very.”

“Not stiff and cold? You know, I have never seen her anything but rather stiff and cold.”

“And I have never seen her either stiff or cold,” said Guy. “No, she was just as kind as she always is.”

“And Mr. Monk? What is he like?”

Guy sprang up.

“Berry, he’s a *brute*!”

“A brute, Guy! Why?”

Guy sat down again, and was silent.

“What did he do?”

“I can’t tell you, little one. But never talk to me about Mr. Monk, especially before the others.”

“Guy,”—with a little quiver in her voice—“shall you keep anything back from me? I always know all your secrets, don’t I, Guy?”

“Yes, pet. But one or two things happened to-night which are not my secrets, but concern someone else. I ought not to repeat them, ought I?”

Beryl’s idea of honour was a high one; so, after a little struggle, she answered:

“No, dear; all right. And have you still got my rose, Guy? Oh yes, I feel it in your coat. I am so glad it did not drop out on the way. I ought to have pinned it; but I only thought of that after you were gone; and I ran a long way

down the drive with a pin ; but I could not make James hear."

A streak of light appeared on the ceiling, and a step came slowly down the corridor.

"Oh, Guy," whispered Beryl, "here comes mamma ! I *shall* catch it."

But Guy could just distinguish the large wardrobe, standing on the other side of the room. Quick as thought, he sprang in, and hid behind some dark cloaks.

Mrs. Mervyn entered, candle in hand, on her arm the plush mantle she had been wearing. She advanced to the bedside, and shading the light, looked at Beryl closely. But her breathing came heavy and regular ; evidently she was sound asleep. She turned her head uneasily as the light fell on her face, and muttered : "Eight times nine are sixty-six." Mrs. Mervyn laid her cool hand lightly on Berry's forehead. "Her face is rather flushed," she said to herself. "I must not let her overwork, dear child." Then, turn-

ing to the wardrobe, she opened it, hung up her cloak—nearly touching Guy's hand as she did so—closed it again, and was leaving the room, when apparently an idea occurred to her. Turning back, she locked the wardrobe, took out the key, put it in her dressing-gown pocket ; then, with a parting look at Berry, left the room, and disappeared down the passage. An instant after, her door closed, and all was darkness.

A muffled “Jupiter Ammon ! here's a pretty go !” came from the wardrobe.

Beryl sprang out of bed, seized the handle, tugged and pulled, but all to no purpose.

“Guy, Guy ! what shall we do ? Mother has not only locked it, but taken away the key !”

“What awful luck !” groaned Guy. “But, I say, Berry, you must let me out quick somehow. You womenkind wear such outlandish garments. I've got my head in an old fur thing, which smells—ugh !—like the monkey—

house at the Zoo. I say, make haste, I'm choking!"

"But, Guy darling, what can I do?" said Berry in an agonized whisper. "There is no other key. Pull the fur cloak down, but gently, for its mother's *best*."

A wrench in the wardrobe. Then a sigh of relief from Guy.

"Do you feel better, dear?"

"Yes, better. But I can't stop here all night. What on earth made mother take the key?"

"Oh, I know! I wanted that plush thing of hers for dressing up, and she said we should spoil it."

A dejected silence, both inside and outside the wardrobe. Then a sudden exclamation from Beryl.

"I know, Guy; wait a moment, while I run and see if mother is in bed. Yes, all is quiet, and her light is out. Now I think I can get the key."

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“But, Berry, you can’t slip in ; she always locks her door.”

“I know. Now, Guy, scratch the panels of the wardrobe.”

“What on earth is the good of that ?”

“You’ll see ; do it.”

Guy obediently and patiently scratched for about a minute ; then he heard Beryl jump up, run down the passage, and knock briskly at their mother’s door.

“Who’s there ?”

“It’s me, mother. There is such an odd scratching noise going on in the big wardrobe in my room ; and I can’t open it. You have the key. I know there is something in it.”

“Nonsense, darling. I was there ten minutes ago. You have been dreaming.”

“No, mother ; I’m certain I heard a scratching.”

“Well, if so, it is only a poor little harmless mouse. Run back to bed, darling.”

“Won’t a mouse nibble your cloaks ?”

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A pause ; then Mrs. Mervyn struck a light, got up, found the key, and opened the door.

“ I am sure it is only your fancy, Beryl ; however, I will come and see.”

“ Oh, don’t trouble to come, mother,” said Berry anxiously. “ Give me the key ; I can look.”

“ No, dear ; I prefer looking myself. I have just put away my opera-cloak, and if it should be a mouse——”

“ Well,” thought Guy, “ we’re about cotched.” And he began to consider whether he should say “ Boh !” and jump out with a flourish, or stand well back, and wait to be discovered. Fortunately he decided on the latter course.

They entered, Mrs. Mervyn carrying the light. She turned the key, and very cautiously opened the wardrobe ; then, as nothing came out with a rush, she threw the door wide open, and, holding the candle up high, began

to feel about among the cloaks ; but, quick as thought, a little puff of wind came from behind them, and out went the candle. Beryl executed a silent hornpipe in the dark for joy.

“ How tiresome ! ” said Mrs. Mervyn. “ Are there any matches here ? ”

“ No, mother ; you know you told Eugénie to take away mine to-night.”

“ Well, I will fetch some ; you would not know where to find them. I shall not be a minute.”

“ Now, Guy, fly ! ”

And Guy fled ; and as he reached his own room he heard Berry say : “ It’s no good looking any more, mother ; for what was there came out in the dark, and rushed past me, and down the passage.” Nevertheless, they hunted for the mouse, but did not find it.

And some time afterwards Guy told his mother the whole story ; and she could not

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help laughing over it, though she called them both "very naughty children."

That night, the last thing Guy looked at was the white azalea ; and, after putting out his candle, he kissed the stalk where her fingers had touched it, and whispered : "Oh, Lady Elaine, my darling ! my love ! what would I not do for your sweet sake ?"

And almost at the same time Lady Elaine, standing before her dressing-table, her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders, was thinking of Guy. For her eyes had fallen on her fan, as it lay upon the table. And she stood long, wrapt in thought ; then took it up, and, saying to herself : "It shall never be used again," put it away at the bottom of her dressing-case, and with it the white azalea she had worn that night.

And there, long years after, Guy saw them both.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“BERRY.”

“Yes, Guy?”

“Put an extra lump of sugar in my cup; I feel abominably out of sorts this morning, and in a vile temper.”

“Nonsense, darling! your temper is never vile. Of course you feel tired and headachy from being up so late last night; but, oh, Guy”—in an impressive whisper—“if *you* feel out of sorts and cross, what must Gerty be this morning? Aren’t you glad she is breakfasting upstairs?”

“Rather!”

Only Guy and Beryl had appeared in the breakfast-room at eight o’clock, their usual

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breakfast hour. Mrs. Mervyn and Gertrude both sent down word that they were over-fatigued, and would take theirs upstairs. Beryl, looking bright and fresh as if she had gone to sleep the night before at nine o'clock as usual, took her mother's place behind the urn, highly delighted at presiding there, and at the lovely prospect of a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with Guy.

But Guy was moody and out of sorts. He leaned his elbows on the table and his chin upon his hands, and looked vacantly and dejectedly before him.

Berry eyed him sharply once or twice with a pang at her loving little heart.

“Something happened last night which has troubled and upset him,” she said to herself; “the secret he couldn’t tell me. I am sure it is entirely over that horrid Lady Elaine! How dare she make my Guy unhappy, and tell him things he can’t tell me! Well,” with a wise little shake of her head,

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“ I always knew I should have great anxiety when Guy fell in love ; but I never expected such a complication as this.”

However, Berry chatted away merrily all breakfast time, and rejoiced to see that, unlike most love-sick youths of whom she had read, Guy’s appetite was certainly unimpaired. Surely, if he were very far gone, he could not have got through two such huge helpings of game pie, *besides* the fried sole and stewed kidneys !

“ He will soon get over it,” she thought ; “ and I shan’t have to murder Mr. Monk, and be hanged on Guy’s wedding-day, as I dreamt last night.” Then, aloud : “ Guy dear, after you were gone yesterday I spent all the evening practising that hor—I mean that difficult—accompaniment to the *Ave Maria*, and you can’t think how beautifully I play it now. My right hand *will* run away a little still ; but the left always manages to catch up to it in two or three bars ; and,

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otherwise, I *do* play it so nicely—quite as well as Gerty. Shall we go to the music-room and try it together? I am sure half an hour with your fiddle would do you good; and Miss Hope does not arrive till ten, thank goodness! I have my 'Cornwell' to learn—but that I never know, so it won't make any difference whether I spend five minutes over it, or an hour—and those awful German verbs; but, you know, Guy, you said all Germans wanted hanging for talking such a language, and that it was great bosh to learn geography from books—the only true way was to go and see the countries; so I can tell Miss Hope that. She always thinks so much of your opinion. Shall we go?"

"All right," said Guy.

What Berry called "the music-room" was a large, uncarpeted billiard-room, where Guy kept his guns, fishing-rods, and musical instruments. Of the latter there was a large and varied assortment—from a piano to a

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penny tin whistle; but first, and most important, were his violins. He had three of these. In a place of honour, over the mantelpiece, hung the first he ever possessed, a toy one, which his mother had bought for half a crown and given him on his ninth birthday; and upon which he had taught himself to play so well, that a year or two later a friend made him a present of a real violin—a real *good* one—worth a whole half-sovereign! For years this was his only fiddle; but almost his first act, when he found himself with plenty of money at his disposal, had been to buy, for forty guineas, the beautiful violin which was now his great delight.

Its clear pure tones rang out fervently, this morning, in Gounod's wonderful *Ave Maria*, contrasting curiously with Beryl's very energetic, but rather jerky, accompaniment, and penetrated to Mrs. Mervyn's ears as she came downstairs. She crossed the hall and looked into the music-room. They

both ceased playing, and came forward to greet her.

“I want to speak to you before you go out, my dear boy. Will you come to my boudoir presently?”

“At once, mother dear, if you like,” he answered brightly. Beryl’s remedy had acted on his spirits like magic. He put away his violin, and, still humming the air they had been playing, followed Mrs. Mervyn to her sitting-room.

“Shut the door, please, dear; and now, sit down. I want to talk about something rather special.”

Guy seated himself on the arm of an easy chair, and looked expectant. Mrs. Mervyn took up a sock she was knitting, and commenced counting the stitches. Evidently she found it difficult, now the moment had come, to broach this special subject.

Guy grew restive. He loved the sight of his mother’s sweet, gentle face at all times;

but he certainly did not care to know how many of those little red silk stitches each needle contained.

“Is it about the new flower-beds, mother? If so, I have a splendid idea for the centre.”

“No, Guy; it is about what occurred last night.” Mrs. Mervyn laid down her work and looked at him; then said, very decidedly: “Guy, we must have nothing more to do with those people.”

Guy’s face changed, but he only said quietly:

“What people, mother?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Monk.”

“*Mrs.* Monk?”

“You know perfectly well who I mean, Guy. Mr. Monk and Lady Elaine. Now, as you know, I quite disregarded the village gossip about them, feeling sure we should soon find out whether or no they were desirable acquaintances. We had an opportunity of doing so last night; and, as I said

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on the way home, I consider them most undesirable, and I hope, my son, you will see with me the necessity of discontinuing all further intimacy at The Towers."

Guy rose, came and stood opposite his mother, and leaned his arm on the mantelpiece. Then he said slowly :

" It seems to me, mother, that you are making rather a mistake. All your expressions of disapproval are in the plural. They should be in the singular ; then I could thoroughly agree with them. In fact, I would go further, and say that I consider Mr. Monk a confounded blackguard, unfit for any decent society ; and I, for one, have no wish ever to meet him again. But of course we are not going to cut Lady Elaine for Mr. Monk's ill-doings, or let his conduct make the slightest difference to our friendship with her."

" Now, Guy, this is absurd ! My dear boy, in society you cannot draw the line like

this between a husband and wife. Either we visit at a house, or we do not ; and, even if Lady Elaine were all that is delightful and desirable——”

“ *If*, mother !” cried Guy hotly. “ Why do you say *if*? Pray, what have you against Lady Elaine ?”

“ Guy ! is that the way to speak to your mother ?”

“ I beg your pardon, mother,” he said more quietly ; “ but I think it is not quite just to imply anything against her.”

“ Well, Guy, if you wish to know, I did not at all like the way Lady Elaine behaved with you last night. You are young, and, I am glad to say, unused to the ways of society and worldly women ; but her manner was commented upon by several, who considered, as well they might, that Lady Elaine *flirted* with you.”

“ What a lie !” cried Guy passionately. “ Mother, how can you listen to prating old

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scandal-mongers like Miss Pringle and Mrs. Biscoe? They are furious with Lady Elaine because she snubs them a bit ; and a good thing too, vulgar old women ! *She* flirt with *me* ! How can you say so. mother ?”

“ Guy, answer me this one question. Did Lady Elaine take you into the conservatory really *only* to show you the white azalea ?”

Guy had never lied to his mother. He did not do so now. He bit his lip, and was silent for a minute ; then said :

“ She wished to talk to me. mother. Where was the harm of that ?”

A long silence between them. Then the mother spoke.

“ Guy, my own dear boy, will you listen quietly to what I have to say ? Do not pain me, darling, by being angry and speaking strongly, as you have done. It is not like my Guy to do so to his mother. You know what passed between us about Lady Elaine, when first you met her. No—I will not

allude to it beyond just saying that the knowledge of the strong feeling she had called forth in your heart, before you knew much about her, made me the more anxious, when I saw how rapidly your intimacy with her was growing, in spite of our agreement that night, that you had better see as little of her as possible for the present. But, dear boy, last night showed me clearly the danger you are in. Lady Elaine, cold and impassive as she is to most people, is very fascinating and attractive in her manner to you. This is only because she has taken a passing fancy to you ; her life, perhaps, is not a very happy one, and you amuse her with your bright manner and high spirits. But, darling, this must not go on. Cannot you trust your mother to know what is best for you ? Guy, I have never known you break a promise made to me. I want you to make one now, which will save you from much sorrow and future regret. I know if you

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make it you will keep it. Promise me, darling, that for the future you will avoid Lady Elaine Monk, merely bow to her if you meet, and not speak to her, or renew your intimacy with her. Now is the time to break it off; and after last night it will not surprise her."

"I cannot promise that, mother," Guy said—gently, but firmly.

"Guy, you are no longer a boy, nor are you so much under my control as when you were younger. But, because you are now a young man, do you intend to disobey your mother, and disregard her wishes?"

"No, mother," he said earnestly. "If growing up means that, I shall be a boy at fifty!"

"Then promise me, darling."

He dropped on one knee beside her and took her hand in both his big ones.

"Mother, believe me, you are unjust to Lady Elaine. You do not know her as I

do; or—far from thus cutting her because of his conduct—you would love her, and long to comfort her and brighten her sad life. Do be kind and nice to her, and ask her here, and get to know her well. I know she likes you, already; and it is such a shame to cut her, just because she has had the ill-luck to marry a brute."

He spoke in earnest pleading tones, looking into her face with those wheedling blue eyes, which she had never known how to resist. But the mother's heart, generally so tender to everyone, was hardened through fear for her darling's welfare.

"No, Guy," she said, "I could never like her. She has done you harm already."

"But I cannot cut her, mother. Suppose I meet her out of doors, and she speaks to me, and I have given you this promise, what should I do?"

"Well, Guy, we will modify it. Will you promise me that you will not seek out

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Lady Elaine, but that, as far as possible, you will avoid her?"

"Mother, I cannot make these promises."

"Guy," and his mother's tone was full of pain, "this shows me that you still feel far more strongly for Lady Elaine than is right. Even your mother's earnest wishes are disregarded and set aside, that you may continue to meet one whom you have only known for a few short weeks, and of whom your mother, who has had your undivided love and obedience for all these years, strongly disapproves. Is your feeling for this *married* woman stronger than your love for your mother, Guy?"

He saw her tears, and heard the ring of bitter pain in her voice.

"I promise, mother," he said, and left the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

IT was a lovely summer afternoon, about a week after the dinner-party at The Towers.

Lady Elaine had thought the day too hot for any exertion, and had spent it lying back in a large wicker garden-chair, on the lawn, beneath the shade of a huge cedar, reading the last new novel from Mudie's. But after awhile she grew weary of reading, and lay back dreamily watching the sunbeams as they peeped through the dark boughs overhead and danced across her white dress and over her hands, making her diamond rings flash and sparkle. She lay so still and motionless, that the little rabbits came out

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and gambolled about quite close to her, and then threw up their silly little heels and vanished when by chance they became aware of her presence. And Lady Elaine, as she watched them, fell to thinking how good it must be to be able to run away so quickly from anything one feared and dreaded ; and in her heart she envied those little playful rabbits. And the sparrows hopped about overhead, pecking up the insects on the boughs, and chirping joyously to one another ; and Lady Elaine thought how good it must be to be able to choose one's own mate and make a happy little nest together, high up in some quiet corner, where no one could come prying and peeping and interfering. And then her thoughts wandered far back into the past, to a time when her wishes had been thwarted, her heart's choice set aside, her young life blighted, by the imperious selfish will of another.

“ Tea is in the drawing-room, my lady.”

“ You can bring it out here, James.”

Then she roused herself, and went on with her book, drinking her tea as she read ; and presently a soft breeze began to stir and whisper in the trees ; the heat was no longer so intensely overpowering ; and Lady Elaine took up her white parasol, and strolled across the lawn, and through the park, and out into the shady lane leading to the woods.

The nearest way to reach them was across Farmer Hurst’s wheatfield ; but when she came in sight of this it was still such a blaze of heat and light, that Lady Elaine almost doubted whether the shade and coolness of the woods beyond would sufficiently repay her for crossing it. While she hesitated whether to go on or to return, she saw Guy Mervyn standing in the lane, resting one arm on the stile and looking over the field. He wore a light tweed suit, and carried a long fishing-rod.

“ At last I have caught him ! ” thought

Lady Elaine, with a pleased smile ; and she quickened her pace. But almost at the same moment, Guy, without turning his head in her direction, vaulted over the stile, and walked rapidly across the field. He had gained the wood, and was out of sight by the time she reached the stile.

“ I am certain he knew I was coming, and wished to avoid me,” thought Lady Elaine ; but she felt neither hurt nor offended. It was not her way to be offended with those she liked. “ He thinks it will be painful to me to meet him, after what happened on that dreadful evening,” she thought ; “ but how tiresome ! I wish I had called to him to wait.”

A cloud of dust in the lane, and Bidger, hot and panting, dashed past her, and bounded over the stile in pursuit of his master.

“ Bidger !” cried Lady Elaine.

He stopped and looked back at her.

“ Come here, Bidger.”

He trotted back, wagging his tail, and looked up into her face ; then half started off again, with a short excited bark, as if to show her that his time was precious and must not be wasted.

“Wait one minute, Bidger.” And taking a note-book from her pocket, she tore out a leaf and wrote upon it : “*I want to speak to you, Sir Guy. Will you come back for a few minutes ?—E. M.*” “Here, Bidger, take that to your master,” she said. And the intelligent animal put his forepaws up on the stile, and gently took the leaf out of her hand with his teeth. Then bounded across the field, up into the woods, and was out of sight in a moment.

Lady Elaine walked leisurely along between the wheat, stopping every now and then to gather some poppies and blue corn-flowers. When she reached the other side, Guy stood by the stile, waiting to help her over.

“ My messenger lost no time,” she said, smiling, as she put her hand into his.

“ You could not have chosen a better,” Guy answered ; and they strolled up into the woods together.

“ Were you in a hurry to get home, Sir Guy, or can you spare a little while to enliven my solitude ?”

“ No hurry at all, Lady Elaine. We do not dine until eight, on these long evenings ; sometimes later. Even Beryl was in a state of collapse to-day from the heat ; so I have been out alone, fishing.”

“ And I have been alone all day also. What a pity I did not know where you were fishing ; I could have come and watched you. By the way, Guy, how did you know I was coming down the lane just now, when you jumped over the stile and made off so rapidly ?”

Guy flushed.

“ I heard your step,” he said ; then,

looking at her earnestly : “ but, indeed, Lady Elaine, it was not that I did not wish to meet you.”

“ I know that, Guy. Now here is my favourite seat ; shall we rest awhile and get cool ?”

They had just entered the wood, and Lady Elaine stopped before a soft mossy bank which sloped gently up to the trunk of a huge beech-tree. Behind it, the bracken fern grew thick and high ; to the left, the path went on into the wood ; to the right, it turned abruptly down the rather steep way they had climbed from the cornfield. Opposite, was a lovely peep through the trees : the little village church, with its white spire and ivy covered walls ; the picturesque thatched cottages nestling round it in the valley ; and far away in the distance, across the river and over the meadows, the white chalk hills rising high and clear against the blue sky.

“ I love this little nook,” said Lady Elaine,

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seating herself, and leaning back against the trunk of the beech-tree. “ I sometimes spend hours here. What could be more perfect than that view before us ? and how exquisitely framed by those hazel trees. Guy, you don’t half admire it ! ”

Guy was looking at her, not at the view.

“ Indeed I do,” he said gravely, turning to look at it for the first time.

“ Sit down and enjoy it, then,” said Lady Elaine ; and he threw himself down beside her, with a sigh of content. Surely this was not breaking his promise, for she had asked him, and how could he refuse ?

Then they talked on about the view, and the trees, and the chalk hills, and the walks, and where was the best fishing ; and anything and everything but the one subject uppermost in both their minds. And as they talked, Lady Elaine began absently, with her left hand, picking up all the little bits of sticks and leaves and twigs from the moss between

them, and put them in a heap together. And Guy watched her do it ; and noticed how very white her hand was, and how blue the veins looked, and how loose her wedding-ring seemed to be. And when all the space between them was cleared, he playfully took a handful from the other side, and dropped them there ; but she, without noticing, picked all those up, and put them with the rest. And then Guy took a little bit of stick, and put it into her hand and looked up at her, smiling.

“ What is it ? ” she asked. And then they both laughed.

“ Did I really make that little heap ? Do you know I often do those sort of things quite unconsciously, while I am talking or thinking. Sometimes in writing a letter, if I come to a standstill for want of something to say, I find afterwards that I have torn a piece of paper into a thousand little pieces, and made a tiny Mont Blanc on my table.”

“Do you often write letters?” he asked.

“Not often; and then never long ones, excepting to one special friend. But, do you know, Guy, I very nearly wrote to *you* the other day; only then I made sure I should see you again long before now.”

“What about?” he asked, in a low voice.

“About—what happened the other night. Oh, Guy!” and she turned her beautiful eyes to him, full of trouble; “I have wanted so to tell you, ever since, how I felt about it. It was so terrible, so disgraceful! And you behaved so nobly. I wanted to thank you——”

“Don’t!” he said huskily; “I did not mind at all, so far as it only concerned me. And you gave me the flower. I knew what you meant.”

“But it was such a shameful insult. It must have cost you so much to let it pass unpunished. I scarcely dared hope you would, when I asked it: afterwards I

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wondered what could have made you give up revenge, simply at my request."

He opened his lips to answer; then checked himself, and looked away over the cornfields, to the distant hills.

"Guy, I shall never use that fan again."

They were silent for a few minutes, then Guy's hand stole along the moss, and took hold of Lady Elaine's. She did not withdraw it, or even seem conscious that he held it. But Guy—ah, Guy, was not your mother right? His heart beat wildly, as his fingers closed, with a strong firm clasp, over that soft, unresisting hand. "It is worth a blow," he thought to himself, "ay, fifty blows, to sit with her like this for as many seconds."

"So you know something of my sorrows?" Lady Elaine said presently, with a sad smile. "I dreaded your hearing or finding out; but somehow now you *do* know, it seems to comfort me a little, for you are so sympathetic

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and kind, Guy. Some people—indeed, most people—cut me promptly when they find out what I have to bear. Rather hard, is it not? I knew you would not do that; and yet I feared your knowing. I should not have asked you or your mother to dine with us the other night for that very reason, but Mr. Monk insisted. That is always the way—new friends come, go, and I see them no more.” She sighed deeply, and added, half to herself: “And I, who so sorely need help and friendship!”

Surely she must feel the tightening clasp of those strong brown fingers, she must hear the quiver of suppressed emotion in that clear young voice, as he says, low and earnestly:

“ Dear Lady Elaine, I am an awful duffer at expressing what I mean, and I can’t put into words what I have felt ever since that night, but indeed there is nothing I would not do for you.”

"You have proved that," she said with a smile. "You are very good to me, Guy. How quickly we have grown to be friends! It seems only the other day that Bidger bounced out upon me in this very wood."

"Just six weeks ago yesterday," Guy said.

"When does Mr. Branscome arrive?"

"Next Monday, most likely."

"I hope you will like him."

"I hope he will like me!"

Lady Elaine laughed.

"Not much fear about that, Master Guy! And shall you work hard with him?"

"I don't know," Guy said, rather ruefully. "Sitting poked up over books on these glorious days won't suit me. My mother suggests that he and I should travel together this summer. That would be rather jolly in some ways, but—I don't want to leave here."

"Well, I am rather interested in Mr. Branscome. He does not know me, nor I

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him ; but I have heard a good deal of him from a mutual friend. You say he is coming on Monday ? Try and let me know on Tuesday how you like him, and what you think of him, and whether he seems bright and cheerful and all you expect. I should like to write and tell my friend, who would be greatly interested in hearing all about him. But how and where shall we meet ? You have become such a Will-o'-the-wisp lately, and only appear to vanish out of sight again ! I will bring my book out here on Tuesday evening about this time ; so you will know where to find me ; and, if you can, do come and give me an account of your new tutor.”

“ I will come,” Guy said.

Down in the valley the church clock struck seven.

Lady Elaine started. “ How the time has flown !” she exclaimed. “ I must go home. Look at the pink glow on the chalk hills from

the reflected sunset; and what a cool, delicious breeze. Do you know, Guy, I feel better than when I came out; though much of our talk has been of a rather dismal character, and," she added, smiling, "just a little sentimental! I had spent the whole day alone; and one's thoughts—mine, at least—are not cheerful companions."

She rose—and they left the wood together.

## CHAPTER X.

“WE have all been voting morning service a mistake on such a sweltering hot day! What is your opinion, Mrs. Joram?”

“Well, Sir Guy, the heat may be an impediment to our devotions, but should not prevent them, I think.”

The Mervyns, on their way to church, had overtaken and joined Mrs. Joram. Guy walked beside her. They had met once or twice since the dinner-party at The Towers, and taken a strong mutual liking to one another.

“It won’t hinder mine,” said Guy with fervour, and a merry twinkle in his eyes. “The fact is, Mrs. Joram, I am afraid I have none

to hinder. Hot or cold, I am not of a very devout turn of mind."

"Ah! but you should not talk lightly of the Church and her holy services," replied Mrs. Joram gravely. "Young and old, we are all glad, sometimes, to turn for help to her priests and their sacred ministrations."

"Yes," said Guy seriously, "*three* times."

"Three times?" Mrs. Joram looked puzzled.  
"Why three times?"

"Don't you know the story of the Irish priest who wished to impress on his congregation that it was their duty to support him rather more liberally; and at the close of his sermon, summing up the great obligations under which they lay, he said impressively: 'Why, I've christened ye, and married ye, and *buried ye!*'"

Mrs. Joram could not help laughing, but she shook her head at him all the same.

"You are a sad reprobate, Sir Guy, and utterly unfit to be patron of the living! If

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it ever becomes vacant, do let me have a voice in the nomination."

"Ah!" said Guy, laughing. "You would choose a man who would come out in green satin, with a gold cross on his back, and be quite tip-top 'high' in every way. Well, I should not mind it for a change; at least, we should get things done rather more decently and in order, and a clean sweep made of the cobwebs and Bones's sepulchral drawl, and that awful choir a bit improved. Have you noticed the special place in this new Te Deum where they go so distractingly flat? I always feel inclined to shy all the books in our pew at their heads, one after the other."

"Poor things, they do their best!"

"It's a very poor best, then," said Guy. "However, thank goodness, they will all be too hot to sing to-day. And the organ-blower will want more prodding up than ever. You know, he always goes to sleep between whiles; and the organist leans over

and gives him a dig in the ribs with a chant-book, a minute or so before he is wanted ; whereupon he starts up with a snort, and commences blowing violently to make up for lost time. Mind you watch!"

"Sir Guy ! I really shall not walk to church with you another day. And if you only come to look out for all the ludicrous things in our poor little service, you might just as well stay away, for all the good it will do you."

"No, no, Mrs. Joram," said Guy penitently. "Now, don't look angry with me ! I will keep my eye on *you*, during the whole service this morning, and then I am sure to feel good and reverential."

"You are quite incorrigible !" said the old lady, tapping his arm with her prayer-book. "Why, here is Lady Elaine ! Let us join her. Well, Elaine, so the heat has not kept you away to-day ? I have just been lecturing Sir Guy, here."

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“Really! What is his offence?” asked Lady Elaine, looking at him with that special indulgent smile he had learnt to watch for now.

“Talking very irreverently about——”

“Now, Mrs. Joram, don’t tell tales. I only ventured to remark that church is a mistake on such a hot day, Lady Elaine.”

“Well, I must say I agree with you, Sir Guy.”

“I will tell you what I would do,” said Guy, “if I were the Vicar. I would have the service out in the open air, in some nice cool, shady place—say, in the woods, or under the big trees in the park. At least, people could keep awake there.”

“Not at all a bad idea,” said Lady Elaine.

“What a curious service it would be if you took it, Sir Guy,” remarked Mrs. Joram. “What sort of sermon would you preach, I wonder?”

"I should not preach a sermon at all," said Guy. "When that time came, I should vacate the pulpit, and stand up old 'Many Mussies' for the people to look at. Her face is better than a sermon any day."

"Guy!" panted Beryl, coming up, hot and out of breath, "mother wants you. She is some way behind."

Guy, raising his hat, turned back with his little sister. The two ladies walked on together.

"The more I see of that young man, the better I like him," said old Mrs. Joram decidedly.

"Yes, he is a nice boy," said Lady Elaine.

The service was nearly over. It certainly had been as close and oppressive as Guy had foretold, though all the windows and the large door stood wide open. The first hymn chanced to be "By cool Siloam's shady rill," and as they rose to sing it, Guy glanced at

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Mrs. Joram with such a comical raising of his eyebrows as quite upset that lady's gravity.

But somehow, all through the service that morning, Guy could scarcely take his eyes off Lady Elaine. She sat exactly opposite him, and the people who usually occupied the intervening pews were absent; so from his corner of the back chancel pew he looked straight across to where she leaned rather wearily back in hers. "What a study she would make for a Madonna," thought Guy; "or the picture of some holy saint. I wonder whether Raphael ever had such a lovely model." The sunbeams, streaming through the transept window, lit up her golden hair, till it shone like a glory round her fair sweet face. How white and delicate she looked, leaning her head against the dark oak panel her eyes half closed, like a tired child. Guy felt a strange pang at his heart as he watched her. The instinct of true manhood stirred

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within his breast, and awoke to sudden life. A mighty yearning arose within him to have the right to put his arm around her and bid her lean on him ; to stand evermore between her and all that was evil, hard, and bitter in this cruel world ; to shield her from all sorrow; to guard her from all pain; to shelter her within his strong young love for evermore. But close upon this newborn longing followed the sickening thought : these rights are all another's, and he—tramples upon her ! Guy clenched his big strong hands convulsively. There was something so pathetic about that lovely head, laid wearily back against the hard, dark panel ; the sad droop of those sweet lips ; the quivering of those white eyelids. Guy could hardly bear it. But then, poor boy ! he loved her, and he had never loved before. Surely, he thought, if his mother would only look across the chancel now, she would feel differently towards Lady Elaine. He glanced at her,

but she appeared intent upon the sermon, which made him rather unreasonably impatient.

So it came to pass that whenever Lady Elaine looked up that morning, she caught Guy's blue eyes fixed upon her with a curious half-wistful expression in them. He looked away instantly, but very soon she would be conscious again of that earnest, steady gaze.

"Tiresome boy!" she thought; "what does he mean by staring me out of countenance like this! I shall scold him on Tuesday."

But afterwards she remembered the look in his eyes, and wondered she had not understood it.

Mrs. Mervyn took an unusually long time at the end of the service in collecting and putting away her books; and then, taking Guy's arm, she walked very leisurely down the aisle; so they were almost the last to leave the church, and everyone else had gone on before. Guy understood his mother's

object perfectly well, and he silently chafed at it.

In the churchyard they found Bidger. Guy had not allowed him in church since that first Sunday, but he was generally waiting for them when they came out.

Guy gave a rapid glance up the lane leading to The Towers, and just caught sight of Lady Elaine's white parasol, as she turned the corner and passed out of sight.

Poor Guy felt savage, not exactly with his mother, but with things in general.

Their way home lay in another direction, and they were just turning away, when Beryl, who had followed Guy's glance, exclaimed :

“ What is that black thing, lying in the middle of the lane ? ”

“ It looks like a book,” said Guy ; “ some-one must have dropped it. It is too hot to go and see. Here, Bidger ! Fetch it, sir ! ”

Bidger looked round and hesitated ; but as soon as he saw what Guy meant, dashed

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off up the lane. He stopped and sniffed at it carefully ; then gave a joyous bark, picked it up, and bounded after them. Beryl tried to take it from him as he passed, but he swerved to one side, and, dexterously avoiding her, brought it straight to his master. It was a small pocket Bible, bound in dark blue morocco stamped in gold with two initials, “E.M.” Guy opened it. On the fly-leaf was written in her own handwriting “*Elaine*,” and underneath, a date.

“It is Lady Elaine’s,” he said ; “she must just have dropped it.” And he closed it, and put it in his pocket.

“You had better give it to the clerk or the pew-opener, Guy,” suggested Mrs. Mervyn.

“I think not, mother,” he answered quietly. “As we have found it, it will be more civil to return it to Lady Elaine ourselves. I will give it her when next we meet, or send it up to The Towers.”

No more was said on the subject, and they

walked on, Guy feeling considerably less savage. It was very nice to have Lady Elaine's little Bible lying safely in his breast-pocket; and on Tuesday he could give it her.

*Tuesday!* What a confounded long time it is from Sunday to Tuesday!

## CHAPTER XI.

IT was barely half-past five on Tuesday afternoon when Guy walked rapidly through the woods to the trysting-place appointed by Lady Elaine. “It is early,” he said to himself, glancing at his watch, without stopping; “she will not be there yet awhile; but it would have been hopeless ever to get away, if I had not given mother and Gerty the slip while they were in the garden.”

To his surprise, however, as he came in sight of the old beech-tree, Lady Elaine was there, seated in her favourite place, bending intently over a book in her lap.

She looked up with a smile as he stopped before her.

“I did not expect you so soon, Guy. I have been here most of the afternoon, and the time has flown ; for I am deep in such a charming book, by a new author, ‘True Heart’s-ease ;’ have you read it ?”

“No,” said Guy, throwing himself down on the moss at her feet. “But don’t stop for me, if you are in the middle, Lady Elaine. I came off early because Gerty had a hundred and one things she wanted me to do this evening, and I knew if I waited I should never escape. Please don’t shut the book. I am quite happy here ; and I know how horrid it is to have to leave your hero in a hole.”

“Oh, no one is in a hole just now. They are all particularly happy. However, I will just finish my chapter.”

She bent over the page again, and they were silent. Guy, leaning on his elbow, looked away over the cornfield, with a strange feeling at his heart ; passing sweet, yet very

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sad and bitter. Ah ! if he could always lie at her feet like this ; if he and she could stay for ever in this fairy-land—they two alone, and no one else beside ! But what right has he to be here ? What right has he to love her ? What would she think if she could see into his heart, and know—all ?

A lark suddenly shot up from the field below them, and rose on the wings of its joyous song, high, high into the deep blue overhead. Its little body seemed driven upwards by the force of that ecstatic, boundless, overwhelming rush of song. A thrush in the beech-tree above them, stirred by the sudden burst of praise from the lark, trilled out its own low, thrilling love-notes. A cuckoo answered from a distant tree, replied to by another, so far away in the wood that it sounded like a distant echo of the first. The sheep-bells tinkled down in the valley, and the church clock struck six.

“ Guy, what are you thinking about ? ”

He started violently. Lady Elaine had finished her chapter, closed her book without arousing him from his reverie, and sat watching him.

"You don't look quite like yourself this evening. Is anything the matter?"

"No," he said, with rather a forced laugh; "I'm all right."

"Well, now for the news. Has Mr. Branscome arrived?"

"Yes, Lady Elaine; and, do you know, I think I shall like him awfully. He is a very good-looking fellow, rather too pale and thin, but with such a clever intellectual face. He is reserved, and seemed nervous, even with me, at first; but when he felt more at home, and I drew him a bit, he came out well, and seems to have plenty in him."

"Does he look delicate?"

"Yes, very. He is tall—nearly my height— but stoops a great deal. He has a queer habit of sighing every now and then, quite

unconsciously ; and he looks to me as though he had passed through some great trouble, and has not yet quite got over it."

" Ah !" murmured Lady Elaine, half aloud.

" He is awfully nice in manner ; and not in the least cock-a-hoop or stuck-up about all he knows, though mother heard that he came out wonderfully high at college. I can see he likes my little Berry, for he smiles at her fun, though he is not much given to smiling. Gerty has made sheep's-eyes at him, poor man, ever since he entered the house ; but he appears entirely unconscious of the fact. He is a little short-sighted, so perhaps he does not see it ; rather a good thing, too ; for you know, Gerty is a very pretty girl, and goodness knows, I don't want him falling in love, and going spooning about after her all over the house."

" I don't think you will find him very susceptible," said Lady Elaine ; " and, Guy, I think you are right about his having had a

trouble lately. Perhaps when he knows you better he will tell you about it. If he does, and you can do so without breach of faith, I wish you would tell me. I have a special reason for being interested in Cyril Branscome."

"Certainly I will," said Guy. "And no doubt you will soon see him, Lady Elaine. If we meet you when we are together, shall I introduce him?"

"Do, please; but don't repeat to him anything I have said, or tell him that I know his friend."

"All right," said Guy; then added: "He does not look at all clerical, except for a white tie; and I believe we shall hit it off wonderfully well together."

"I am very glad," said Lady Elaine; then added, smiling: "What a minute description you have given me of him. Do you always observe every little detail about people?"

"Oh no!" he answered; "but, you know,

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you said you wished to hear all about him ; so I made a point of noticing everything."

" I hope I shall remember it to tell my friend—and his," she said.

" Lady Elaine," said Guy presently, " I have something of yours in my possession, and I fully meant to bring it back to you this evening ; but, coming away in such a hurry, I entirely forgot it."

" What is it ?" she asked.

" A little pocket Bible, which you dropped in the lane on Sunday. We found it, and I have it at home."

" Oh, thank you !" she said. " I really had not missed it, though that is rather a favourite one of mine. I gave it to myself last year, as a birthday present ! I remember it was the only present I had, for no one else remembered the day."

" Then is the 8th of October your birthday ?"

" Yes. I suppose you saw the date on the

fly-leaf. Ah, but talking of Sunday, Master Guy, reminds me that I have a scolding in store for you!"

He looked up at her inquiringly.

"What did you mean by staring me so hopelessly out of countenance during the whole of the morning service?"

Guy crimsoned to the very roots of his hair.

"I—really—I am awfully sorry, Lady Elaine!—I didn't for a moment think—well—think you saw!"

"Of course I saw! But you have not answered my question: Why did you do it?"

Guy, looking, not at her, but straight before him, answered:

"Because I was thinking about you."

"And what were you thinking? Come, make a full confession, and perhaps I will forgive you."

He turned, and looked at her with a strange smile.

“Perhaps you would never forgive me if I did that,” he said in a low tone.

“We shall see. Were they such very uncomplimentary thoughts?”

Guy was silent for a minute, and did not answer. All that was noble and good in his nature was fighting hard against passion and impulse. The odds were pretty even ; one straw either way might turn the scale.

“Well, I was thinking,” he said presently, speaking in slow, measured tones, as if carefully choosing his words ; “I was thinking what a study for a Madonna you would make, and how like the pictures of the saints you looked, with your golden hair for a glory.”

“You silly boy!” she said, laughing. “I must bring a screen to church with me next Sunday.”

But Guy did not laugh. He turned his head, and looked away through the hazel trees. She could see his profile ; and it

seemed to her, for a moment, that his lips were quivering.

"Guy," she said, in a low, gentle voice; "I am sure you are not yourself to-day. You are unhappy, or not well, or something is the matter. Do tell me what it is, dear boy. How often I have told you my troubles, and you have given me your sympathy! Now tell me yours."

She leaned towards him, and almost without being conscious of what she did, stroked his wavy hair gently as she spoke. How the touch of her fingers thrilled his every nerve. Guy sprang to his feet. Involuntarily Lady Elaine rose also, looking half perplexed, half vexed.

"I think I must have offended you in some way, Sir Guy, but quite unintentionally; and how, I do not know."

Then Guy turned with a sudden desperate cry, and caught her in his arms, and, before she could prevent it, kissed her passionately

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on the lips ; then dashed through the tall bracken fern, and left her standing there alone.

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Lady Elaine stood where he left her, as one half stunned. She listened mechanically while the thrush, who had just begun to sing when they rose, finished his song. She leaned against the trunk of the old beech, and watched the long shadows cast by the trees, reaching almost to the cornfields ; she watched the wheat swaying gently in the evening breeze ; then, thinking “It is late,” she stooped to pick up her book and her hat, which lay at her feet ; but, as she did so, the full realization of what Guy had done burst upon her ; and, overcome with shame and anger, she sank down on the moss, and hid her face in her hands.

When she raised her head at last, Guy was kneeling at her feet.

“Oh, Lady Elaine !” he cried ; “forgive

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me ! for God's sake, forgive me ! I was mad—mad—or I should never have done it !"

" I wish you would go away !" she said tremulously. " Is it not enough to have so insulted me, without coming back to talk about it ?"

" Insulted you !" he cried passionately. " Oh ! Lady Elaine, you don't understand ! I love you ! *I love you !* I suppose all this time you have looked upon me as a boy ; but I have been learning to love and worship you madly, hopelessly, with a love which can never change or die !"

She gazed at him aghast.

" Guy ! what do you mean ? You must not say all this to me. I did not know—I never dreamt of such a thing. I had grown so fond of you ; you seemed so young and boyish ; you burst like a gleam of sunshine into my cheerless life ; I just enjoyed your brightness, and gave you my friendship in return, and thought of nothing else. But I

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*ought* to have thought. Alas ! that it should have come to this ! Guy, bid me good-bye, and go. We must not meet again."

But he, still kneeling at her feet, seized her hands in his, and looked eagerly into her face.

"And why ?" he said. "*Why*, Lady Elaine ? Where is the harm of my loving you, sweet ? The man who may do so, who ought to do so, whose right it is, who comes between us—confound him !—cares nothing for you, but makes your life wretched. While I—oh, my darling !" his voice grew tremulous with passionate tenderness ; " I would gladly give all my hopes in this world and the next for one kiss of your sweet lips, one touch of your dear hand. Let me love you—let me worship you—let me be with you like this sometimes ; for I love you—I love you !"

Then Lady Elaine rose, and turned from him in bitter scorn and anger.

"How dare you, Guy Mervyn! How dare you speak thus to me! What cause have I ever given you to suppose such things may be said to me? I thought you noble, true-hearted, chivalrous. I see I was cruelly mistaken. For the future we meet no more, if I can prevent it. Good-bye!"

With an exceeding bitter cry, Guy flung himself down on the moss at her feet, and lay there quite still, his face hidden on his arm.

Lady Elaine lingered, looked at him, and hesitated. She really loved him, poor boy, with a genuine affection. Perhaps the very consciousness of this had made her speak more harshly. It went to her heart to see him lying there, his proud young head so low, his whole attitude betokening such hopeless misery. How could she leave him thus? She came slowly back, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Guy," she said, "I forgive you. I am

also greatly to blame. I am so much older than you, and should have been more careful. You must forgive me also. And some day, when we have both forgotten—as well as forgiven—perhaps we may meet and be friends again."

He raised his head ; the look of reckless despair in his eyes haunted her for weeks.

"I shall never forget!" he said.

So she turned away sadly, and left him lying there ; and slowly, with drooping head, she crossed the field, between the waving corn. And, faint in the distance, she heard behind her the low sweet notes of the thrush, still singing in the old beech-tree ; and in her heart his voice—in tones of passionate tenderness—crying : "I love you! Oh, I love you, sweet!" But she left them both behind ; and slowly, with drooping head, passed on to her loveless home.

## CHAPTER XII.

BERRY was broken-hearted. She lay curled up on the floor in Guy's room—her face hidden against the side of his bed—sobbing her poor little heart out, and would not be comforted.

The room was in considerable confusion, the floor strewn with litter, odd gloves, boots, fishing tackle, bits of paper. All was suggestive of recent packing and bustle; but now the room was deserted—the owner of the rubbish was gone—and nothing remained but the one little desolate figure crouching down beside the bed.

Gertrude came in, and—with really kind intentions—tried to rouse her.

“Come, Beryl dear ; don’t stay up here all by yourself. What are you crying about ? Of course, we shall all miss Guy ;<sup>¶</sup> but if we really love him, we must think first of his good, and not of ourselves. Think how delightful for him to go abroad, and with that dear nice Mr. Branscome, too. I am sure *I* should like to go abroad with Mr. Branscome. Certainly, it was a little annoying of Guy to be so very sudden in his resolve to go, and in such an unnecessary hurry to be off ; but then we must remember Guy is always rather erratic in his proceedings. What did you say ? You wish I would leave you alone ! Oh, certainly, Beryl ; but I am rather surprised at you. When I was your age I had far more self-control.”

“Hang your self-control !” said Berry’s angry little voice, from among the bed-clothes ; then, as Gertrude’s footsteps died away, her sobs broke out afresh. “Oh, Guy, *my* Guy ! What shall I do ?”

The door was pushed gently open ; something entered noiselessly, and a cold nose touched Beryl's cheek. "Oh, Bidger, Bidger!" she cried, and turned and threw her arms round him, hiding her face in his shaggy coat.

What a wonderful comfort there is in *silent* sympathy! Beryl found it so now. Bidger could not, fortunately, mar his sympathy by any ill-chosen words or unwise remarks, and Berry soon began to feel better. She sat up, and pushing back her tumbled hair, took the dog's head in both her hands, and looked into his eyes.

"Bidger dear," she said ; "I really believe you have been crying too ; and well you may, poor doggie ; for he has left you behind—gone without you for the first time. Now, Bidger dear, you can't *talk*, not being human, nor supernatural, like Balaam's ass ; not that I wish you ever to be like Balaam's ass, for when he *did* speak, he had nothing pleasant to

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say, and had much better have held his tongue. But, as I was saying, you can't talk ; but I know you can *feel*, and *think*, and *understand*. Now, is it not perfectly brutal of Gerty to come and talk to me as she did just now ? Of course she does not feel Guy's going abroad. She is not his *little one*, like I am ; nor his *doggie*, like you, dear ; so she goes on talking like a guide-book about the 'advantages,' and the 'scenery,' and the 'beneficial results,' and so on ; and never sees that Guy has gone away wretched and miserable over something. That is the hard part of it all. If Guy had gone off happily, to enjoy himself, it would be different ; but, oh, Bidger ! he was in dreadful trouble. I sat outside his door last night in the dark for a long time, and I heard him walking up and down the room ; and, when he put his candle out at last, he was tossing and turning about in bed ; so I slipped in, and went to him, and his head was so hot. He seemed half asleep and half

awake, and I said : ' Guy darling, what is the matter ? ' And he said : ' Oh, Berry, it's all up. She hates me now ! ' And I said : ' No, darling ; I am sure she doesn't.' And he said : ' Yes ; for I *kissed* her ; she will never forgive me.' And I said : ' Lady Elaine ? ' And he said : ' Yes.' And then he seemed to wake quite up, and would not tell me anything more, but sent me back to bed. But this morning before he went away, he said to me : ' Little one, your sharp eyes have seen that I am in trouble, and perhaps you half guess what it is about. You must not mind my not telling you ; only remember it is all my own fault ; no one else is to blame. And promise me, Berry, that if ever you meet Lady Elaine you will be kind, and sweet, and nice to her.' So I had to promise, Bidger, to be kind, and sweet, and nice to that *horrid* Lady Elaine, who has driven our Guy away ! Fancy his leaving you and me, who have loved him all our lives, just because of *her* !

Bidger ! I'll tell you a secret. *I hate Lady Elaine!* and I know you do, too, dear ; but, all the same, if we meet her we must be kind, and sweet, and nice ; only we'll take care *not* to meet her, won't we, old doggie ? So Guy really kissed her ! I wonder at his taste. I would sooner kiss the marble statue down in the hall. But she ought to have been proud and delighted to be kissed by our Guy ; and have hoped he would do it again ! Oh, Bidger, Bidger ! he must have got to London by now. What shall we do without him ?”

Bidger sighed sympathetically, and his eloquent eyes spoke volumes in reply to Beryl's tearful question.

“ Beryl,” said Gertrude, looking in, “ Mrs. Joram has called, and is very anxious to see you. If you are sufficiently recovered, mother wishes you to come down.”

“ Mrs. Joram ?” cried Berry. “ Oh yes !

Come along, Bidger, we will go and see her ;  
she is fond of our Guy."

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About a week after that eventful talk with Guy in the woods, the mid-day post brought to Lady Elaine a small package, bearing the London postmark, and directed in a bold, rather boyish hand. Somehow she knew instinctively from whom it came, and whose was the round, clear writing, even before she turned it over and saw the Mervyn arms on the seals. She opened it, and drew from the silver paper, in which it was wrapped, her little pocket Bible. "So he has returned it," she said to herself; "but why should he have gone to London, and sent it from there?" And then she noticed that the book, though exactly similar to her own in size and binding, with her initials stamped on the cover precisely in the same way, looked newer than hers. One or two little dents and scratches which she remembered

were not to be seen. She opened it, and turned to the fly-leaf; it was blank. She laid it down with a sad smile. "Poor boy!" she said; "he has kept mine, and exactly matched it in London. I wonder if he thought I should not notice? Well, he is welcome to have it, I am sure; poor Guy!" She sat for awhile lost in thought; then carefully examined the papers in which it was wrapped; but not a line, not a word could she find. Then she took up the book and listlessly turned over the pages. "I wish he had put my name in it," she thought. Suddenly something caught her eye—a text underlined in pencil. Lady Elaine read it; then put down the book, and with heightened colour walked to the window, and looked out into the garden. The text Guy had marked was this: "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*"

"Mrs. Joram, my lady."

Lady Elaine came forward to greet her.

Mrs. Joram seemed rather excited and disturbed in her mind about something. After a few commonplace remarks, she said, rather suddenly :

“ And so, Elaine, we have lost our young Squire ! ”

Lady Elaine looked surprised, and turned to her inquiringly.

“ What ! you have not heard ? Ah ! I remember you said you had not been out at all these last few days. Well, Sir Guy has suddenly gone abroad with this new Mr. Branscome ; and, from all accounts, is likely to stay there some time.”

“ Indeed ? ” said Lady Elaine. “ I had not heard of it.”

“ I wonder he did not bid you good-bye before he went,” said Mrs. Joram. “ I thought you and he seemed particular friends.”

“I saw him last Tuesday,” remarked Lady Elaine.

“Oh, really! Well, he was off on the Friday. He looked in on Thursday afternoon and said good-bye to me; because he had settled to come to tea at Rookwood that evening, and bring his little sister, and he came to explain why he could not do so, and to take leave of me. I could not understand what had come to him; he seemed perfectly broken down—all his fun and high spirits gone; in fact, Elaine, I should have said that that young man had been crossed in love, if there were any likely young lady about.”

“Indeed?” said Lady Elaine.

Mrs. Joram glanced at her sharply.

“He went to London on Friday, and crossed to Paris yesterday; and most likely they are going to Switzerland in a day or two. But Guy left all these arrangements to Mr. Branscome and his mother; provided he got away, he did not seem to care where he

went. He said to me : 'I want change, Mrs. Joram, that is all.' I could see he was dreadfully afraid of my thinking he had any other reason for leaving home ; but a frank, open face like his can never deceive one. Most likely the Mervyns are all to go out and join him in a few months ; and they expect to spend the winter in the South."

"Indeed?" said Lady Elaine.

Little Mrs. Joram tapped her foot impatiently on the carpet ; then asked sharply :

"Elaine, what has happened to upset that boy and break his heart, and send him suddenly off abroad like this?"

Lady Elaine turned to Mrs. Joram with an expression of quiet surprise in her beautiful eyes, and a slight raising of her eyebrows.

"Really, Mrs. Joram," she said slowly, "if you have any reason to think Sir Guy made a confidante of me, and that I know more of his reasons for going abroad than you do, you must also know that I should not be

likely to divulge them without his permission."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Joram. "Well, I only hope he has not been played with by a woman, and lost faith in our sex. His is one of those simple, honest, loving, trustful natures which only become worldly-wise through much bitter experience of the ways of the world. I don't know when I have so quickly grown fond of anyone before, or felt anything so much as his going away like this."

The next time Mrs. Joram called, 'her ladyship' was 'not at home.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ CYRIL.”

“ Well ?”

“ You won’t ever try to guess who she is ?”

“ Of course not, old fellow. You can trust me, can’t you ?”

“ Trust you ? I should think so ! And I believe you are what Berry calls a terminus.”

“ What is that ?”

“ Well, if you tell Gertrude, for instance, anything in confidence, she promptly tells it in strict confidence to somebody else, who repeats it to half-a-dozen other people ; and so your unfortunate secret goes branching off in all directions. This Berry calls being a junction. But anything I tell

Berry, or she tells me, we never let out ; so she calls that being a terminus, because the secret goes no further."

Cyril laughed. "I fear most people are junctions," he said ; "but on my honour, I am a terminus."

The two young men were drifting slowly along in a boat on the Lake of Geneva. Guy lay back, lazily dabbling one hand in the water ; not looking at his companion, but far away to the distant snow mountains. Cyril Branscome, resting on his oars, made no pretence of rowing, but just kept the oars in the water, and guided the little boat as it floated along in the current. His deep-set eyes were fixed on Guy with earnest interest ; his usually pale face was slightly flushed. They had been drifting thus for more than an hour, and Cyril knew at last the reason of their sudden departure from Mervyn Hall. Guy had told him everything ; his infatuation, his folly, his shame and

misery ; and the desperate heartache, from which he had tried to escape. And Cyril understood now much that had hitherto puzzled him about his friend. His was one of those fine sensitive natures which not only feel sympathy, but understand how to make their sympathy felt ; and he had done Guy good, and helped him already to take a more hopeful view of life. Guy had told him all—all but her name. That he could never tell, even to his dearest friend.

It was a soft September afternoon, quite early in the month. All was peaceful and quiet ; no sound broke the stillness, save the occasional splash of Cyril's oars. They floated past old Chillon.

" It's awfully deep here," said Guy, leaning over the side of the boat, and looking into the depths beneath ; " fifty fathoms, and more. I say, Branscome, wouldn't it be jolly to go in head first, and sink quietly down to the bottom ! "

“Nonsense, Guy ; sit up, will you ? You’re tipping the boat half over ; and I have no wish to go there with you !”

“Really ?” said Guy, with a peculiar smile. “You sometimes look, old fellow, as if a little journey of that kind would just suit you.”

Cyril made no answer, but bent to the oars and pulled on steadily for a few minutes. Guy lay back again, letting the water run through his fingers, and listlessly humming to himself :

“ ‘ Her brow is like the snowdrift,  
    Her neck is like the swan,  
    Her face it is the fairest  
        That e’er——’

“Oh, hang it ! Branscome, can’t you talk ?”

Cyril smiled quietly. “To tell a fellow to talk, is the way to put out of his head every single thought he has there. But, apropos of the snowdrift, just look at the old Dent

du Midi. Did you ever see such glorious colouring?"

Guy looked up to where the seven snowy peaks rose majestic. They had caught the reflection of the setting sun, and were tinted a delicate pink. It was a lovely sight, and they watched in silence while the first flush deepened into rosy red.

Suddenly a dull pain came at Guy's heart. The boat, the lake, the vineyards, the mountains, all vanished. He was looking through some hazels at a distant view; he could almost feel the touch of a soft hand resting in his, and hear a sweet voice saying: 'Look, Guy, at the pink glow on the chalk hills from the reflected sunset.' Oh! why, why did everything he saw thus serve in some way to remind him of Lady Elaine?

"Turn the boat, Cyril," he said, "and let us go back to Vevey."

"Not just yet," objected Cyril. "Why, this is the most perfect time of the whole

day, and we have nothing whatever to do at Vevey. Suppose we land over there by those trees ; it looks a jolly place, and we can make the boat fast to the bank."

"All right," said Guy, "anything you like."

"Now this is what I call perfection," remarked Cyril cheerfully. "To lie at full length on a mossy bank, with fine trees overhead, a lovely sunset view before you, and the best fellow in the world to talk to!"

"And I hate lying on mossy banks!" grumbled Guy, throwing stones into the water ; "and I abominate sunset views ; and as for the latter part of your remark, I conclude you are going to talk to yourself!"

"Now don't be a bear, Guy ; for I have something special to say to you."

"Well ? Say on."

"Come and sit down here, and leave that poor wretched duck alone. You have hit it

twice. Do you think Swiss ducks have no feelings?"

Guy laughed, but came and sat down on the bank; and then sighed, and began picking all the little stones and twigs off the moss near him, and making a little heap of them.

"They say," began Cyril, "that the way to lose a friend is to lend him money. You lose your money, and you lose your friend."

Guy looked up inquiringly. "Well?" he said, "what of that?"

"But suppose," continued Cyril, "that at the same time as you lent your friend ten pounds, he also lent you ten pounds?"

"Well, then you would be quits," said Guy, laughing, "and there would be no fear of losing your money. But what are you driving at?"

"Look here, Mervyn," began Cyril earnestly, raising himself on his elbow as he spoke. "Between two fellows like our-

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selves, I believe one-sided confidences to be a mistake. You have trusted me this afternoon with yours ; but some day you may begin to wish you had not done so ; you may fear lest I should betray it ; and that would be the ruin of our friendship. But suppose I give you my confidence in return ; and tell you a harder, ay, and a more bitter story than yours, and one which has never passed my lips to any other man ; why, then, as you say, we shall be quits, and each mutually trust the other."

All Guy's listless nonchalance of manner disappeared in a moment, as he leaned across, and held out his hand to his friend.

"A bargain, old fellow!" he said ; "and yet I don't altogether like your reason. I should never lightly distrust, when once I have trusted. Tell me nothing which would cause you pain in the telling, unless you honestly wish it yourself."

"I have long wished it," said Cyril ; "and

somehow—I know not why—memories of the past, and of one I knew in the past, have been incessantly forcing themselves upon my mind the whole day. Perhaps if I tell you now, they will haunt me no longer."

He paused and looked away. Into Guy's mind came the recollection of Lady Elaine's words: 'He has had a great trouble; and perhaps when he knows you better he will tell you about it.'

"Before I went to Cambridge," began Cyril, speaking slowly and quietly, without looking at Guy, "I lived for some time with a clergyman, as one of his pupils. He was a clever, ambitious man. Those of us who cared to work got on well under him. I read hard, and was his favourite pupil; not that he cared much for any of us, for he was hard, selfish, and self-absorbed. He had one daughter."

Cyril paused, and a deep flush rose slowly

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on his pale face, and as slowly passed away ; leaving him paler than before.

“I cannot describe her to you, Guy, beyond just the plain facts that she was small, and dark, and slight ; and, in my eyes, loveliest among women. It was not so much any special beauty of features ; perhaps some, who judged only by those, might even have called her plain. It was the wonderful sweetness of soul in her face—the tender gentle spirit looking out from those brown eyes—which so strongly attracted me. Would to God,” he cried with sudden energy, “oh, would to God I had never seen her !— Well, Guy, it was not a sudden affair with me, this falling in love. I did not do it, like you, in a day. But we were much together, she and I. We had many tastes in common. She was clever, very clever ; though she rarely allowed anyone to be aware of the fact, or see how much she knew. I remember once, however, when we were

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talking alone together, I used a Greek quotation, then apologized and was about to translate it, when she, smiling, capped it with another. I soon found that she had read, or was reading, many of the books I was then studying myself. She made me promise not to tell the other fellows; but smiled shyly, and said she did not mind my knowing. Guy, when you begin to have little secrets or private understandings with a woman—when she singles you out as being rather different to the other fellows, look out, for from that moment you are in danger."

"I know it," said Guy sadly.

"Well, her sweet, shy sympathy was a great help and encouragement to me; and after four or five hours of hard reading, I used to count on a stroll in the garden with her before lunch. And she would ask me what my work had been during the morning; and sometimes, if she was intending to read in the afternoon, we used to settle to read

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the same thing, and compare notes about it afterwards. And so my chains grew and grew, until at last I had to own to myself that I loved this girl with a love such as a man can only feel once in a lifetime. I loved her better than my life. I would have laid down a hundred lives for her ; and, fool that I was ! I thought that she loved me. I did not know then, as I do now, that a woman will *look* as though she loves you, and *sigh* as though she loves you, and *blush* as though she loves you—ay—and even *talk* as though she loves you—yet all the while mean nothing, absolutely *nothing*, by it. It was sport to her, but death to me!"

"Perhaps she did love you," said Guy quietly.

Cyril laughed a bitter laugh.

"Not she!" he said. "You will see when I tell you all. Guy, I was your age then ; I am six years older now. Believe me, I know women. They are all alike ; they play with

a man's heart as a cat plays with a mouse. It is interesting and amusing to them to have someone near who watches, with hungry eyes, their every movement ; who treasures up their every word ; whom they can make sad or glad at will, by a smile or a glance. They like to be loved ; ah—yes, they like to be passionately, madly loved ; they like to have a man's whole heart and soul in their keeping ; but you must not expect their love in return, especially if any difficulties are in the way. Oh no ! They never quite meant *that*. And if at last, weary of giving and waiting, you ask for more, then—in return for all your love, for your wrecked life and your ruined soul—you will get a ‘Good-bye,’ and ‘Yours sincerely,’ and you may go your ways. Ay, I know them ! Never trust a woman. They will lead you a Will-o'-the-wisp dance for awhile, and land you in a bog at last !”

He flung himself back exhausted, and threw his arm over his face.

Guy was silent for a time, then said quietly :

“ It may be so with some of them, Cyril ; but the one I love is good and true. I would trust her with my life.”

“ So *I* thought once,” said Cyril, more calmly ; “ but listen, and hear the end. I told you we were much together. Well, her mother knew of our friendship, and encouraged it. She was kind enough to be fond of me. Her father, always engrossed with his pupils or his books, noticed nothing. She was her mother’s constant companion ; in fact, one of the traits I especially admired in her character was her unselfish devotion to both her parents, and her tender, thoughtful little ways with them. Such a daughter, I used to think, would surely make a good wife ; for I was fool enough, and presumptuous enough, to hope to have her for my wife.”

“ Presumptuous ?” said Guy. “ Why, my

dear fellow, with your talents you are a good match for any girl."

"They did not think so," said Cyril, "as you will see. She and her mother used to spend a great deal of their time in a pretty little boudoir upstairs. How well I remember that room! In summer she kept it fragrant with flowers; and in winter it used to look so cosy, with the crimson curtains drawn, a bright log-fire blazing on the hearth, making strange lights and shadows everywhere; for it was one of my darl—one of *her* fancies to have tea by the firelight on winter evenings, and she would not have the lamp in until afterwards. Sometimes, as we rose from the luncheon-table, and she passed out of the room first, with her mother, I would see her glance at me as though she had something special to say; and then, as I lingered and managed to cross the hall last, she would stop half-way up the stairs, and leaning over the banisters, with a smile,

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whisper : 'Cyril' (I had asked her to call me so, and she did when we were alone), 'mother hopes you will come up to tea with us this evening.' And I used to look up and answer : 'Indeed I will, and *you* know how gladly!' and try to reach her hand through the rails. And she, laughing and blushing, would run up, just out of reach, and then turning, hold up her finger, and say : 'Go to your lessons at once, like a good boy.' And I would answer : 'How can I go while you are standing there?' And then, with another laugh, she would run lightly up the stairs, just pausing at the top to look back and shake her head at me, and disappear into her mother's room. Guy—I *worshipped* her, and she knew it! Then, when five o'clock came at last, and I slipped up to the boudoir, my darling would be sitting on the rug, the firelight shining on her hair and lighting up her face, showing the sweet look of welcome she turned on me. Or she would

be on the floor near the sofa, her head resting in her mother's lap; and they would not move when I came in, except to make room for me near them. She always liked sitting on the floor. I remarked it to her once, and she looked up with a bright smile, and said :

“ ‘ He that is down need fear no fall,  
He that is low no pride.’ ”

She was very fond of old George Herbert. Then she would make tea, and insist on handing me mine, and not letting me get up for it; saying it was her place to do the waiting; and we would laugh and quarrel over this, until between us we spilled some of the tea; and then her mother would smilingly scold us both. And afterwards we used to sit in the firelight, and talk over our favourite authors, and my afternoon's work; and she would, half shyly, suggest thoughts and meanings in certain passages which had not occurred to me. Then, as the room grew darker, and the fire burned low and red, I

used to venture to take her little hand in mine. At first she got up, as if half frightened, and moved nearer to her mother ; but there came an evening when she let me have it, only her voice trembled a little when next she spoke ; and her little hand lay in mine for the rest of that happy hour.

“ But why,” cried Cyril, breaking off almost angrily, “ why do I tell you all this ? Why do I still remember every look she gave me, every word she spoke ? I was being befooled, yes, *befooled* the whole time ! Guy, you must be sick of my sentimental twaddle. Let me hurry on and tell you the end—the bitter end.

“ The time came for me to leave, and go to Cambridge. Just before I went, I saw her alone and told her, what she knew already, that I loved her, passionately, deeply, and as I could never love another ; that hence-forward I should live and work for her, and for her alone. Did she love me enough to

reward me, some day, when the time came that I could ask it? She seemed much overcome and trembled violently, but she let me put my arm round her; and more—she hid her face on my shoulder. She whispered something in answer to my eager questions, about not feeling it right to make any definite promises without her father's knowledge. Did she love me at all? She raised her eyes, wet with tears but bright with love, to mine. ‘Surely, you *know* that I love you, Cyril?’ She let me kiss her lips, and I left that house, as certain that she was *mine* as if my golden wedding-ring were on her finger. With this sweet hope, making heaven's music in my heart, I worked on hard at college for three years. Sometimes we met in the vacations, but were never alone. She looked more lovely to me each time I saw her, and nothing in her manner ever led me to suppose that she had changed her mind since her answer to my question. I thought

the look of joy in her face when we met must mean love at her heart. Once or twice she wrote to me; precious little letters, evidently seen by others, but full of hidden meaning, which we alone could understand.

“At last my time at college was ended. The summit of my ambition was reached. I only cared for the honours because I had worked for them and won them for her sake. But honours did not bring me a fortune; so even then I did not speak. Before long, I was ordained and easily got a good curacy, not far from her home. The stipend from this, and what I had already of my own, made a comfortable, though not large income. Then I knew I might venture to claim my darling, and have my longed-for reward. I wrote to her father, telling him of my love for his daughter, and that I wished to win her for my wife. I explained to him my exact circumstances; and also said that, though I had loved her for years, I had not

wished to speak to him, or ask a definite promise from her, until I had gained a sufficient income to enable me to marry and keep a wife in comfort. Much more I wrote, not necessary to repeat ; and ended by saying that I would call that evening, as I longed to see her, and could not wait for an answer by post. I went, full of the brightest hopes. I was received by her father, in his study. He coldly and haughtily told me that he could not for a moment entertain my proposal. He looked far higher for his daughter than a curate, with an income of only—so much—a year. He should not consider such a marriage in any way likely to secure her happiness. She had several other suitors ; Mr. ——, mentioning a very wealthy man in the neighbourhood, had only yesterday asked his permission to woo her. He had a sincere regard for me, and believed me to be a young man of considerable talent and ability ; but he certainly looked upon my request as great

presumption, and no more must be said on the subject. I heard him out, in respectful silence ; saying to myself : ' The course of true love,' etc. ; and though I saw breakers ahead, I felt sure of my darling, and knew she would not flinch. When he ceased, I quietly suggested that he might find *her* happiness involved in this matter, as well as my own. ' How dare you, sir ! ' he cried ; ' how dare you imply that my daughter cares for you ! ' ' I do not imply it, sir,' I answered quietly ; ' I am sure of it.' The old man was furious, and spoke in a way I could not have tolerated had he not been *her* father. Then he showed me the door.

Before I go, sir,' I said, ' I think it only right to tell you that, though I addressed you first, as a matter of form, I will take my answer from none but your daughter herself ; and if she will have me, I will marry her in spite of all opposition.' ' Indeed ! And may I ask how you will obtain an interview

with her?' 'I shall find a way, sir.' 'Very well,' he said, 'you shall see her now; and take your answer from my daughter herself, in my presence.' And he left the room.

"So the moment had come; but I was confident my darling would stand the test. In a very short time he returned, and she was with him. We had not met for several months, and at sight of her, forgetful of all else, I sprang forward; but something in her face checked me, and sent a deathly chill through my heart. My hands fell to my sides. I felt powerless to speak or move. 'My child,' said her father, 'this young man desires to marry you. I have refused his proposal, to save you the pain of doing so; but he will take his answer from none but yourself, and informs me that he will contrive to see you, and marry you, whether I give my consent or no.' A dead silence in the room, broken only by the loud

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ticking of the clock. Then she turned to me. Her face was rather pale, but she did not seem much agitated. She spoke quite calmly and collectedly. ‘I cannot accept your offer, Mr. Branscome; and I do not wish you to try to see me, or press it further.’ And so I got my answer; the answer for which I had worked and waited years. Well, Guy,” he said, with a harsh bitter laugh; “am I not right? Not one of them can be trusted. As Eve was to Adam, so has woman ever been to man—his ruin and his curse!”

“Cyril,” cried Guy, “do you mean to say that is all? You heard no more from her? You must have somehow misunderstood her. True love could not change like that; and she said she loved you.”

“*Said* she loved me! Yes, they will *say* anything!”

“Don’t you think her father may have forced her to refuse you?”

“ If that had been the case, could she not have written and told me so? Could she not have given me some hint by voice or manner? No, Guy; the bitter, bitter truth was very plain. The rich suitor gained the day; the faithful lover of years might go to the wall, or the devil—damned for not possessing the golden key to a woman’s heart.”

“ Is she married?” asked Guy.

“ I dare say. But I have never seen or heard of her, from that day to this. I saw her father’s death in the papers about three months ago. *Requiescat in pace!* Of course, I threw up the curacy; and I was ill for about three months, and, I believe, nearly lost both life and reason. After that I went as travelling tutor to several families; but it was horrid work, and I soon sickened of it, and then—we met”—he looked at Guy with his old kind smile, “ and I can thank God that a true, real friend has come at last into my lonely life.”

Guy grasped his hand warmly.

“Cyril,” he said, “dear old fellow, you know what I feel for you about all this ; but I must say, in spite of appearances, I think you should have trusted her. If I loved a girl, and had once heard from her own lips that she loved me, I should love her still, and trust her still, through everything.”

“Then I can only say you would be an even greater fool than I am ; for I only *love* her still. *Trust* her again ? no, never ! Hullo ! it is very near upon dinner-time ; we must row hard all the way back to Vevey.”

“Cyril,” said Guy, as they got into the boat, “this is a queer world ! Do you think there is another, where all things right themselves, and happiness comes to everyone at last ?”

“I don’t know,” said Cyril. “From all accounts, most people will get into worse hot water in the next. Pull away !”

Notwithstanding all their exertions, the two young men came in late to *table d'hôte*. There had been several new arrivals at the hotel that day, and when they entered the dining-room, the long table seemed already over-full. However, a waiter found them their places, with repeated assurances that dinner had only just commenced. They were soon seated, and Guy's neighbour, a talkative little American lady, with whom they had become slightly acquainted, engaged him in animated conversation. Divided between his excessive hunger, spasmodic attempts to get on with his dinner, and his desire to be polite to his fair neighbour, who pressed him with endless questions, Guy had no time to notice anything else going on; but presently a good-natured Frenchman on the other side, seeing Guy's dilemma, heroically engaged the little American lady in conversation, and drew the battery from Guy to himself. Thus relieved, Guy finished his soup, and turned to Cyril;

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but the remark he was about to make died on his lips at sight of his friend. Cyril was as white as the tablecloth, and evidently struggling vainly for composure ; his soup was before him, almost untouched.

“ My dear fellow,” said Guy in a low voice, “ what is the matter ? Are you ill ? ”

“ It is nothing,” Cyril answered ; but in a few minutes, muttering something about being over-tired with rowing, he rose and left the room.

Guy was perplexed and rather disturbed ; but, as Cyril evidently did not wish him to follow, he contented himself with calling a waiter, and giving orders for Mr. Branscome’s dinner to be taken to his room.

A little later, looking up suddenly, Guy surprised a pair of very sweet eyes fixed anxiously and earnestly upon his face ; they belonged to a young lady seated exactly opposite. “ I am positive I have seen that face before.” thought Guy to himself ; “ though

when or where I cannot remember." As soon as an opportunity occurred for doing so unobserved, he took a good look at her. She was quite young, not more than three or four and twenty, with a sweet gentleness of manner, and a most winning expression. A look of exceeding sadness was on her face, but Guy concluded this might be accounted for by the deep mourning she wore. A lady sat next her, in widow's weeds—mother and daughter, no doubt. "Where on earth have I seen her?" thought Guy; and the question perplexed him much. She also appeared interested in him, for he was conscious that her eyes continually sought his face, with an anxious, questioning expression. At last, determined to solve the mystery, he looked up, and, meeting her gaze, leaned across the table, and said, with a smile:

"I believe we have met before?"

"I think not," she answered quietly, but with a suddenly heightened colour.

“I beg your pardon,” said Guy, greatly confused.

And then it suddenly dawned upon him where he had seen that face! In a plush photograph frame on Lady Elaine’s table in the drawing-room at The Towers; and almost at the same instant the whole truth flashed into his mind, and he knew that opposite to him—her sweet sad eyes full of bitter trouble—sat Cyril’s love.

He left the table, and went to seek his friend. Cyril was in their sitting-room, standing near the window, his forehead pressed against the cold glass.

Guy went up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder. Cyril turned and opened his lips as if to speak, but the words refused to be uttered.

“I know,” said Guy; “poor old fellow! Now, look here, take my advice: go down and have it out with her; I could swear, by the look of her, that she loves you still.

Everyone will turn out on to the terrace this glorious night. Go to her, Cyril—go!"

"Never!" he said, clenching his hands. "Never! I would sooner die! Remember her words: '*I do not wish you to try to see me, or press it further.*' No, Guy. God knows, I love her still, with the love which has been my undoing; but trust her again, I never could! and marry her, I would not, even if she wished it! Thank goodness, tomorrow at sunrise we are off to Ormont-Dessus!"

"Ah!" thought Guy to himself, "he does not love her as I love Lady Elaine; for I would love her and trust her still, even though I saw my death-warrant signed by her own sweet hand."

## CHAPTER XIV.

GUY sat at the table in his little room at the Pension du Moulin.

His hair was ruffled, and standing on end. His coat was off. He looked exceedingly hot and exhausted ; his whole appearance suggestive of having been engaged in some desperate encounter.

Guy had been writing letters !

Now, Guy very rarely wrote letters ; but when he did so, he set to work in good earnest. His plan was to allow all his correspondence to accumulate, and then one morning, nerving himself to the task, pay off all his debts at one fell swoop.

On this particular morning his labour was

just ended. Four letters lay on the table before him: one to his mother, one to Gertrude, one to Beryl, and one to Mrs. Joram. He had received a most affectionate epistle from old Mrs. Joram a few days before, begging him to write and tell her how he was enjoying himself, and all about his travels, and the places he had visited. This letter he had felt obliged to answer without loss of time, and consequently brought himself up to the scratch this morning, and did his duty to his home people into the bargain.

There lay the four letters, all stamped, directed, and ready for posting; and Guy gave a great sigh of relief and satisfaction as he looked at them. They were each written in a remarkably different style, and their contents varied considerably.

The one to his mother was almost entirely upon domestic matters, in reply to the many tenderly solicitous maternal injunctions he had received from her. A page and a half

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went to prove that a fellow really could not be expected to wear flannel next his skin in this roasting weather, or at any time, for the matter of that ; and it really would be no good her sending out the promised parcel of under-garments ; she had much better give them, instead, to old " Many Mussies," with his love. He never *did* sit in a boat by moonlight, because before that time came they had generally gone in to dinner ; but should such a climax ever be reached, he would promise faithfully not to take cold. " So don't be anxious about me, mother darling ; and for goodness' sake don't send the things ; for if they arrive I shall feel bound to wear them, and Cyril will have a bad time of it. Then as to the stockings, I really can't go ferreting about after an old Swiss woman to mend them. It is so much less trouble to wear them until they are all one big hole, and then shie them away. After your letter came, Cyril said we ought to try the plan ;

and he spotted an old woman living in a chalet not far from here, who looked as though darning came natural to her; so he went and called upon her, with one of my most respectable pairs—it was only quite out at the toes, and a little gone at the heel. Cyril is not great at French, but I coached him up, and he was to say, ‘Madame, ayez l’obligeance de raccommoder ces trous.’ He came back declaring it was all right, and the old girl was quite delighted to do it. But, afterwards, it turned out that Cyril did not make the ‘raccorder’ part clear; and she thought they were a present, and when we went for them they were on ‘le mari,’ and my best pair too, worse luck! So you see, mother dear, your little plan does not work. Therefore, please send out two or three dozen new ones, *instead* of the other things, and I shall be really grateful.”

Mrs. Joram’s letter was the greatest difficulty of all, for she wanted an account of

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what he had been doing, and descriptions of the places he had been to ; and Guy was not great at descriptions. However, a brilliant idea occurred to him. He had resort to the guide-book, and copied half a page, here and there, into his letter ; which consequently read something like this : " We had a very jolly stay near the lake of Geneva ; awfully hot though, most of the time. This is the largest of the Swiss lakes, having an area of 578 square kilometres, or 223 square miles. Its general form is that of a crescent, the northern shore being almost the arc of a circle, with a radius of  $21\frac{1}{2}$  miles. Its maximum breadth between Morges and Amphion is  $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles. Cyril Branscome and I rowed across it one day, and got perfectly stewed. We had to stop and bathe three times on the way back ! The bottom is remarkably free from inequalities ; almost all traces of rocks, erratic blocks, or moraines having been covered over by a regular bed of extremely fine argillo-

calcareous mud. This sounds rather as though I had been there! However, I have not quite—only very nearly; for one day, when we were out fishing, we managed, somehow, to upset the boat, and had to swim ashore. The worst of it was, the fish we had caught did not swim there with us, but preferred going off in another direction."

On the whole, when it was finished, Guy was rather pleased with this letter. "The old girl will not scent the guide-book, and she will marvel at the beauty of my composition and the extent of my information—though goodness knows what 'argillo - calcareous mud' is, for I don't!"

'The old girl,' however, *did* 'scent the guide-book,' and was highly amused at Sir Guy's way of writing her a long and interesting account of his travels.

But the letter to Beryl was his most spontaneous and unlaboured production, and the one he wrote with the most pleasure. And

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words cannot describe the rapture with which Beryl received it, and read and re-read it, until she knew every word by heart.

“Pension du Moulin,  
“Aux Diablerets,  
“Ormont-Dessus.

“MY DEAREST BERRY,

“‘Aux Diablerets’ isn’t swearing, though you might think so, but is really the name of this awfully jolly place ; so next time Eugénie puts you in a rage, you can say : ‘Allez aux Diablerets,’ which will sound strong, and be a comfort, and yet mean nothing more than ‘Go to Jericho.’

“I wish you were here, little woman ; first because I miss you awfully, and have lots of things to tell you ; and next, because you would so enjoy this place. It is ripping ! Out and out the best we have been to yet ; and though we have already stayed here nearly a fortnight, we are not in the least tired of it. The Pension du Moulin is such

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a cosy little place, much more amusing and homely than the big hotels. Madame Du Buis, our landlady, is a regular old Swiss woman—wears wooden sabots, short blue petticoats, and a white cap ; all of which are most becoming. She has a sweet old face, something like our friend ‘Many Mussies,’ and a fine share of quaint humour about her. I sometimes get a lot of fun by going into the ‘cuisine,’ and drawing her a bit. We are great favourites of hers, and she is always making special good things for us, and takes quite motherly care of us in every way. We have really been working hard since we have been here, for we did not do much before. We take our books, and our lunch, and sit out of doors reading most of the day. I think the only way to make work tolerable is to do it in the open air. Cyril is an awfully good fellow. I know you will like him, Berry, when you know him better. He is just like a brother to me. Now don’t be

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jealous, little one ; of course no one can ever, or could ever, take your place. I want you more every day. We shall soon be together again now, if mother really means to come out next month. Will you tell her I want to know whether she has settled to winter at Cannes, or whether it is to be Biarritz ? A lady staying here told me last night, at dinner, of a very jolly villa, just about the size we want, to be had at Cannes, for the winter. If mother will make up her mind, and let me know at once, I will write about it, and send her all particulars as soon as I receive them. Now don't forget this message. I meant to put it into my letter to mother, but of course I forgot, and have stuck it up now.

“I say, Berry—I have a lovely plan ; but don't mention it, or even hint about it, or mother may say ‘No,’ when I am not there to wheedle her into saying ‘Yes.’ You know it would not suit me to stay and moon about

all the winter at Cannes. I mean to travel a good bit with Branscome, and see Italy and Spain, and lots of jolly places. Now I intend to ask mother to let us *take you too!* So there is something for you to think about, little one! Fancy you and me travelling about all over the place together! Won't we have rare fun! You shall have late dinner every day, and go to bed when you like, and do just what you like. So don't you breathe a syllable about it to anyone; and I will settle it all with mother in October. How is my dear old Bidger? I often wish I had him here now. Be sure you bring him when you come.

"I must stop writing, for Cyril is yelling at me from the garden to make haste and come out. We are going ever so far up the Creux de Champ this morning—such a stunning place. I wish you were coming with us, dear.

"Berry—when you write next, I want you

to tell me all about everybody, and how they are : Mrs. Joram, and Miss Pringle, and Mrs. Biscoe, and Lady Elaine, and the whole lot. I want to know if they are quite well ; and if they look happy ; and whether you have met them lately—when, where, and how ? and whether they said anything about me, or sent me any message. *Don't* forget. Berry ; and write *very* soon—directly this reaches you.

“ I hope you get on well all round at home. Give my love to Miss Hope, and tell her I am sure she grows sweeter each day ; that may help to hasten the happy time when she shall cease to be sour !

“ Good-bye, my little one.

“ Always your loving ‘ boy,’

“ GUY.”

Three or four days later, on calling at the queer little post-office at Ormont-Dessus,

Guy received a letter, directed to him in Beryl's round, childish handwriting. He opened it eagerly, and as he walked leisurely back across the fields to Le Moulin, read as follows :

“ Mervyn Hall.

“ MY OWN DARLING GUY,

“ I cannot tell you how awfully delighted I was to get your letter this morning ; *three whole sheets*, all for me ! And Gerty's was scarcely *one*, which made it all the more delightful ! She asked to see mine, but of course I said, No, it was private ; and then she did what you call ‘ kicking up a regular shine ’ ; and said if there was anything in your letter which I could not let her and mother see, it must be of an ‘ undesirable and objectionable character.’ But mother said : ‘ Nonsense, my dear Gertrude,’ and told her to let me enjoy my letter in peace, and keep it to myself if I liked ; upon which Gerty beat

a retreat, murmuring something about 'ridiculous child,' but I was too happy to mind. Oh, Guy, how splendid your plan is! Will mother ever consent? It would be too lovely! Fancy going travelling with my own boy, and nobody to find fault, or talk about my manners and deportment! Do you think people will take us for a young married couple? No, I am afraid my stupid frocks are still too short for that, though mother let me have an extra three inches to my last; but they don't look grown-up yet. Guy, I shall dream of nothing else night and day till we go. Oh! I do hope mother will agree. Mother is going to write to you about plans to-morrow.

"Now I must answer your questions. Lady Elaine is quite well, but does not look very happy. Guy—don't be angry, darling, you know you made me promise that if I met her I would be kind, and sweet, and nice to her; and I couldn't *feel* nice to her, for all

sorts of reasons, and so I made up my mind never to meet her ; and if I saw her coming, I used to run like the wind, in another direction, and Bidger after me : because we wouldn't break our promise to you, and yet we felt we couldn't be kind, and sweet, and nice to Lady Elaine. But three days ago, Guy, I was out in the woods with Bidger. We had been tearing about for ever so long, and I felt very hot and tired, and we came to that old beech-tree, near the way down to the cornfields ; and I lay down under it, just to rest for a minute, and somehow went fast asleep. And when I woke—oh ! Guy—there was Lady Elaine sitting close by me. I sat up, and—*please* don't be angry, darling, I tried to bolt. But she put her hand on mine, and said : ' Won't you stay and talk to me a little while, Beryl ? ' She looked so sad, and so lovely, and I thought of my promise to you ; so I said, ' All right,' and I tried to say it kindly, and sweetly, and nicely,

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but I am afraid I didn't succeed. And then she said : ' We have not met often, and you don't know much about me, but I have heard a great deal about Guy's little Berry.' And then she asked me all sorts of things about you : where you were, and whether you liked travelling, and whether you wrote bright happy letters home ; and I told her all I could ; but she didn't send you any message, only she seemed very much interested, and very pleased. And, do you know, she told me that Bidger only runs away from her when he is with me, and that he has been once or twice to see her at The Towers, and *often* comes and sits by her in the wood. Just think how he has been *deceiving* me all this time ! I never should have believed it of Bidger. So now, Guy, I think I have told you everything. That is the only time I have met her. Of course I have seen her at church, and I noticed that she always uses that same little Bible that she dropped and

we found ; so I suppose you gave it back to her before you went away.

“ That is all, darling ; and please don’t be vexed with me. I can’t help knowing things which I know I’m not supposed to know ; and I can’t help hating people who make my boy unhappy ; but I’ll try to be kind, and sweet, and nice, all the same, for your sake.

“ Gerty has been very good to me, on the whole, since you have been away. But, do you know, that horrid little Percy Flamingo is awfully in love with her, and I think she rather likes it. I wish you were here to see after them.

“ I gave Miss Hope your love, and she kept blushing and smiling to herself all the rest of the morning. I am sure she fully expects to be the future Lady Mervyn. You know, Guy dear, you do flirt most dreadfully, with all sorts of people. It gives me a great deal of anxiety sometimes, for I don’t know where it will end. Now I must say good-

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bye. This has taken me the whole afternoon to write. Mother let me have a half-holiday on purpose.

“ Give my love to Mr. Branscome. Of course I like him, if you do. (Gerty always calls him ‘ that *dear* man ! ’)

“ Many, many kisses, my own dear Guy, from your loving little

“ BERRY.”

Guy folded this long carefully-written epistle, which had taken Berry many hours of labour in the writing ; happy hours, though, to her loving little heart. He folded it, and put it away in his breast-pocket. Then he stood for a long while watching the mountain torrent, which rushes past Le Moulin ; and as he crossed the bridge, and went on towards the house, this was all he said : “ *So she uses it.* ”

END OF VOL. I.







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